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A U.S. MIDSHIPMAN *in the* PHILIPPINES

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER
YATES STIRLING, JR.
U. S. NAVY

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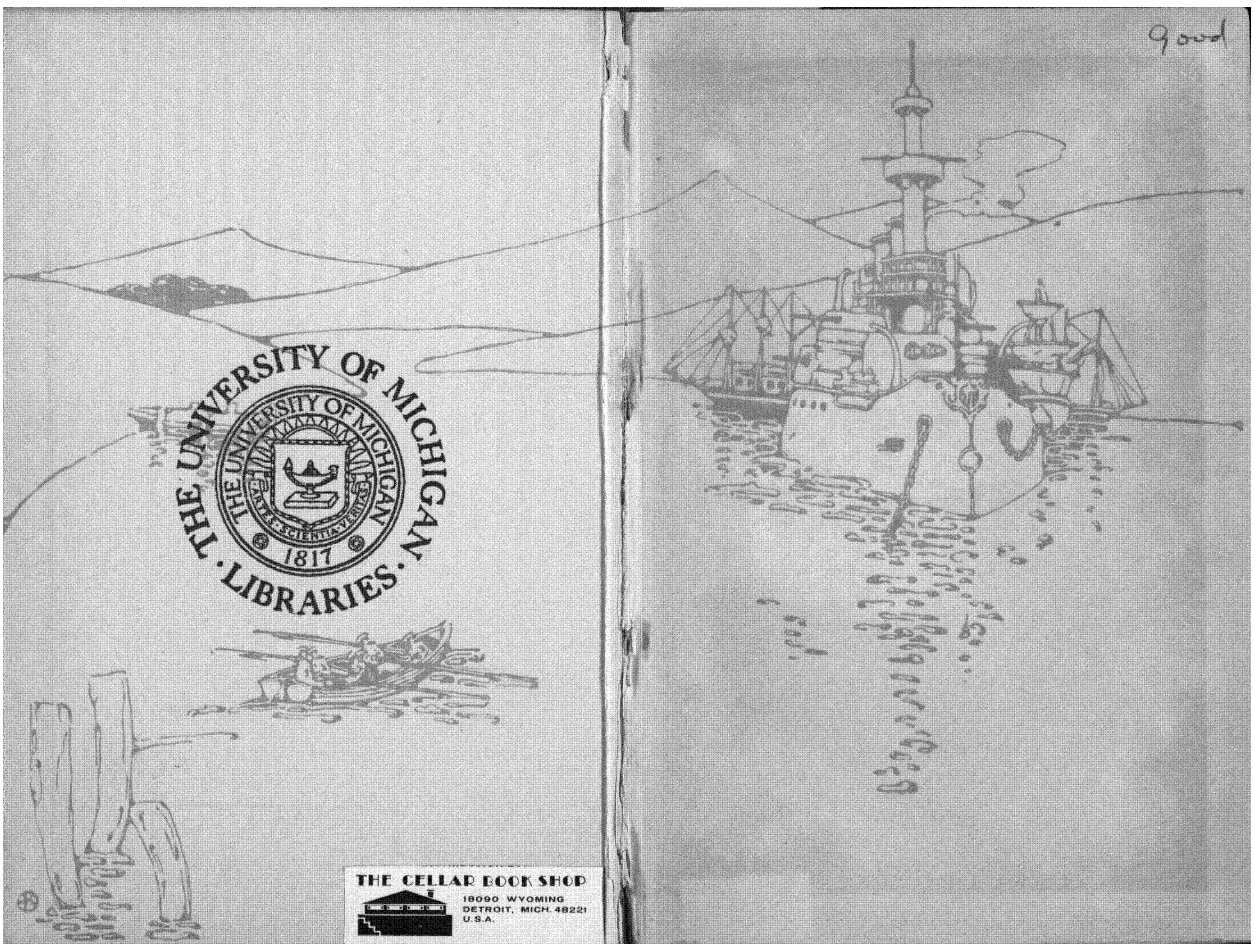

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SOME ONE TURNED ON THE CURRENT

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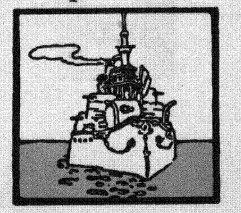
A UNITED STATES MIDSHIPMAN IN THE PHILIPPINES

by

Lt. Com. Yates Stirling Jr. U.S.N.
Author of
"A U.S. Midshipman Afloat"
"A U.S. Midshipman in China"
"A U.S. Midshipman in Japan"
"A U.S. Midshipman in the South Seas"



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Introduction

THE writer has attempted to describe in this volume the life of two young midshipmen of the United States Navy, serving in a small gunboat in Philippine waters.

The fighting between the United States troops and the lawless bands of Filipino bandits (for they were bandits, more or less, after Aguinaldo's army had been dispersed) was in most cases "hand to hand" and to the death. The navy had but small share in this war, but in some instances the helpful co-operation of their web-footed brothers saved the soldiers from embarrassing situations.

Midshipman Philip Perry and his classmate at Annapolis, Sydney Monroe, first made their appearance in "A United States Midshipman Afloat." They had a part in stirring adventures during one of the frequent South American revolutions. Here they became involved in diplomatic intrigue, and had some success; but unfortunately diplomatic successes cannot always be proclaimed to the world.

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"A United States Midshipman in China" told of the adventures of the same boys in China during a threatened uprising of fanatical Chinese against the foreigners. Here again diplomacy counseled silence, and their reward for saving the day was a mild rebuke from their admiral. One of the principal characters in all three books is Jack O'Neil, a typical modern man-of-war's man.

These books are written in an endeavor to portray the life led by young officers in the naval service. The writer's own experiences warrant the belief that the incidents are not unusual. The midshipmen are not merely automatons. To one of Napoleon's pawns an order was an order, to be obeyed, right or wrong. But the doctrine, "their's not to reason why" when "some one has blundered" is no longer accepted as an excuse for poor results. In these days of progress we court-martial an officer who stubbornly obeys an order, when he knows that to do so will injure the cause he has sworn to uphold.

Further account of the boys' stirring adventures will be found in "A U. S. Midshipman in Japan" and "A U. S. Midshipman in the South Seas."

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A United States Midshipman in the Philippines.

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A United States Midshipman In the Philippines

CHAPTER I

THE START FOR PALILO

THE "Isla de Negros," a small inter-island steamer, lay moored alongside the dock in the turbulent waters of the Pasig River, the commercial artery of the city of Manila. As the last of its cargo was noisily carried on board by a swarm of half-naked stevedores, the slender lines which held the steamer to the stone quay were cast off, and with many shrill screeches from its high treble whistle the steamer swung its blunt bow out into the strength of the current.

On the upper deck of the vessel, clad in white naval uniforms, two United States midshipmen stood in silent contemplation of the activity about them. They watched with undisguised interest the hundreds of toiling

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orientals; resembling many ant swarms, traveling and retraveling incessantly between the countless hulls of steamers and lorchas and the long rows of hastily constructed storehouses facing the river frontage. Here and there stood a khaki-clad sentry, rifle in hand and belt filled with ball cartridges, America's guardian of the precious stores now being idly collected. Into these spacious storehouses the sinews of war for the army of occupation were being hoarded to be afterward redistributed among the small steamers plying between the metropolis, Manila, and the outlying islands of the archipelago.

The American army in the Philippines, always too small for the stupendous task before it, was at last, owing to the added disaffection of the tribes in the Southern islands, receiving the attention from home which had long been withheld, and its numbers were being increased by the arrival of every transport from the faraway homeland.

"We are here at last, Syd," Midshipman Philip Perry exclaimed, a ring of triumph in his voice as he turned toward his fellow midshipman, Sydney Monroe. Friends of long

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standing were these two; for four years at the Naval Academy at Annapolis they had been companions and classmates, and during the past year they had together witnessed stirring service in South America and in China.

"We've missed nearly six months of the war," Sydney replied querulously; "from the last accounts, Aguinaldo is on the run. Why," he ended mirthlessly, "the war may be over before we even see the 'Mindinao.'"

"Pessimistic as usual," Phil laughingly retorted; "where we are going, in the words of the immortal John Paul Jones, they 'haven't begun to fight.'"

The steamer had now swung her bow down river, and the chug of the engines told the lads that they were fairly started on their voyage to Palilo, the capital of the island of Kapay, where the gunboat "Mindinao" was awaiting them.

"Hello, what's this?" Phil exclaimed, while the engine bell rang with throaty clanks, and the chugging of the engines ceased. The two lads leaning inquiringly over the rail, saw a small navy launch steam alongside the moving steamer; then a tightly

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lashed bag and hammock were thrown on deck, and finally from the depths of the white canopied awning there appeared the familiar form of a sailor, who sprang nimbly on board, waving a parting good-bye to his mates, while the launch swung away; and again the "Negros'" engines chugged noisily.

"Jack O'Neil!" the two lads cried, their faces beaming with surprised pleasure as they grasped the newcomer's hand.

"It's me, sir," the sailor declared ungrammatically though heartily, highly delighted at his enthusiastic reception. "Telegraphic orders from the admiral to report to Midshipman Perry, commanding the gunboat 'Mindinao.'"

"But where's your old ship, the 'Monadnock'?" Sydney questioned blankly. "We looked for her this morning as we came in on the cattle boat from Hongkong. Is she in the bay?"

"Sure, sir, she is," returned O'Neil, "over there at Paranaque keeping the ladrones out of the navy-yard with her ten-inch guns. They made a rush for it once, about six months ago, then the gugus had an army

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and we were kept guessing; but a few brace of hot ten-inch birds, exploding near them from our coffee kettle of a monitor soon made 'em change their minds. They decided they hadn't lost nothing at the navy-yard after all. But," he ended, the enthusiasm dying out of his voice, "that, I said, was six months ago; we've been bailing out there ever since, awnings furled, guns loaded, expecting to be boarded every night." He made a gesture of utter disgust as he stopped.

"They don't know anything, these gugus," he began again, seeing that his friends didn't understand his disjointed explanation; "they won't try to board a man-of-war. They'll attack you on shore; but as for paddling out in their canoes to capture a steel monitor, it's too absurd. Yet we stood watch on and watch off every night waiting for 'em to board. Do you blame me, sir, for feeling happy when I got these orders?" tapping his telegram against an awning stanchion. "This means life again; like we had in the dago country and up with them pigtailed chinks."

The midshipmen slapped the loquacious sailor joyfully on the back.

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"You're not half as glad to be with us as we are to have you," Phil exclaimed frankly. "We're just aching for something worth while —we've been roasting up on the Yangtse River since you left us, doing nothing except watch the grass burn up and the water in the river fall. I never felt such heat."

While the Americans were talking the little steamer slipped noisily down the busy river and out on the bay made famous by Admiral Dewey on that memorable May morning.

Corregidor Island lifted itself slowly out of a molten sea to the westward. The "Negros'" bow was pointed out through the southern channel, passing close to the precipitous island, standing like an unbending sentinel on guard between the wide portals of the Bay of Manila.

"A few guns over there on Corregidor would soon stop this talk of our waking up some morning and finding Manila at the mercy of an enemy," Phil declared after studying the landscape earnestly. "But these islands are too far away for our people at home to take much interest. Half of them would be glad to see another nation

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wrest them from us.—Hello! there's one of those native lorchas,"[1] he added as his keen eye discovered a sail some miles away almost ahead of their steamer; "we passed one coming in this morning on the 'Rubi.' I looked at her through the captain's spy-glass; her crew were the ugliest looking cutthroats I've ever seen. They reminded me of that picture 'Revenge.' Do you know it?" he asked suddenly turning to Sydney, and then describing the picture in mock tragic tones: "A half score of scowling Malays, in the bow of their 'Vinta'; their curved swords in their mouths and their evil faces lustful with passion and hope of blood, approaching their defenseless victims. I hope the captain gives them a wide berth, for I haven't even a revolver."

The Americans had so far discovered but few people on board the steamer; the captain and pilot were on the bridge while on the lower decks there were scarcely a dozen lazy natives, listlessly cleaning the soiled decks and coiling up the confused roping.

[1] A lorcha is a Filipino schooner; its sails are usually made of a rough canvas, yellow in color, manufactured from a native fibre, usually hemp.

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"Do you think we are the only passengers?" Sydney asked as they entered their stateroom to make ready for the evening meal.

Phil shook his head.

"No, there must be others, for I heard a woman's voice in a cabin near ours."

As they again emerged on deck and walked aft to where their steamer chairs had been placed, a young Filipino girl rose from her seat and bowed courteously to the two young officers. Phil noticed as he saluted that she was a remarkably pretty girl of the higher class dressed in becoming native costume, and from her dark eyes there shone intelligence and knowledge.

"Have I one of the señor's chairs?" she asked in excellent Spanish. "It was very stupid of me to have forgotten mine."

Both lads remarked at once the air of good breeding and the pleasing voice; the guttural lisp so common in the Malay was lacking. She could not have appeared more at her ease and yet they saw by her dark skin and straight black hair that no other blood than the native flowed in her veins.

"This is my small brother," she explained

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as a slight lad of about seven came toward them from behind a small boat, resting on the skids of the upper deck. "He is my only companion," she added half shyly.

The midshipmen were at a loss how to talk to this girl of an alien race. If her skin had been fair they would have welcomed her gladly, seeing before them a pleasant two days of companionship before they would arrive at their destination; but she belonged to a race whose color they had been taught to believe placed her on a social footing far beneath their own.

The girl seemed to divine the hesitancy in the midshipmen's manner, and for a second a slight flush spread over her dark cheeks.

Phil was the first to recover and break the embarrassing silence, heartily ashamed of himself for his boorish manner.

"We are glad, señorita," he commenced haltingly in Spanish which had become rusty through lack of practice, "to have you use our chairs, and also," he ended lamely, "to have you with us. I fear we are the only passengers."

A few moments later a servant announced

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dinner, and the four took their seats at a table spread on the upper deck after the custom of the tropics.

"The captain will not be with us," the girl explained as Phil's eyes rested inquiringly on the seat at the head of the table; "he begs that we will excuse him, for he is navigating the ship through the entrance to the bay."

They sat down in silence; Phil's seat was next to this remarkable girl.

In a few moments both lads had quite forgotten that her skin was dark, so skilfully did she preside over the plentiful board, attentive to their wants with the natural grace of one accustomed to dispense hospitality.

"Juan and I are on our way to Palilo to join our father," she explained after the meal had fairly started. "I am very much concerned over the bad news I have heard. Oh! I hope we shall not have war in our beautiful island," she added appealingly, "but the Filipinos are so ignorant; they will follow blindly where they are led, and so many of our educated men are at heart bad."

"There has been some fighting there already?" Phil questioned.

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"Yes," she answered, "but it has been only guerilla warfare so far. My father fears that reinforcements may come from the north. The natives in Luzon are of the Tagalo race, and if they come after being driven from their island by the American troops, we shall have the horrors of war on Kapay."

The midshipmen's eyes sparkled; they were just about to express their delight at this possibility when they suddenly realized that she was of the same blood as those they were wishing to fight.

Phil was the first to see the reproving look in the girl's eyes.

"You must not blame us, señorita," he hastened to say apologetically. "You see fighting is our business; we look for it the same as a merchant looks for trade or a fisherman for fish."

"I think your ideas are wrong, señor," she replied quickly, but in a caressing tone, to soften the sting. "Your duty is not necessarily to fight, but to prevent fighting. The sisters in the convent taught us that a soldier's duty was to uphold the honor of his country. If fighting only will accomplish this duty, then it is just

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to fight, but in this case no honor is at stake. How can our people hurt the honor of a great nation like yours?"

Phil blushed half angrily, half in shame. This girl of a dark race had the temerity to tell him what was his duty, and he was defenseless, for she was in the right.

"It is true, señorita, what you say," Sydney came to the rescue, "but peace for us is very monotonous, always the same eternal grind. War is exciting; it stirs the blood and makes men of us."

"Yes, señor," the girl answered in a low, hard voice, "and it arouses all the evil passions in us. We forget all our training, all our ideals, all our instincts for good, and give way to the instincts of the beasts. My people in war are not men, señor, they are demons."

While the girl was talking the steamer had drawn closer to the lorcha which Phil had sighted earlier in the afternoon. The night was not bright; a crescent moon cast a dim light on the hull scarcely a hundred yards on the weather bow. The breeze had freshened, and with wind free the lorcha's sails bellied

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out, giving it a speed almost equal to that of the steamer.

"Why doesn't he give that sail a wider berth?" Phil exclaimed suddenly as the girl's voice died away. "If she should yaw now, she'd be into us."

"Look out!" Sydney cried in alarm as the lorcha suddenly sheered to leeward and the great mass of tautening canvas careened toward the unsuspecting steamer.

The midshipmen were on their feet in an instant, while O'Neil came running up from the deck below.

The Spanish captain, calling loudly to all his saints to witness that it was not his fault, jammed the helm to starboard, throwing the steamer's bow away from the rapidly approaching lorcha. The engine bell clanked riotously, as the excited Spanish captain rang for more speed. Then the Americans' blood froze in their veins, for the chugging of the noisy engines had ceased in a wheezy wail, and the "Negros" lay helpless, almost motionless in the path of the strange sail to windward.

The lads looked at each other in consterna-

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tion. The suddenness of the emergency had rendered them powerless to act.

"Was it only a stupid blunder? Or was it by design that the silent lorcha had shifted its helm and stood down upon the demoralized steamer?" were the questions that came into their minds.

A guttural hail from the lorcha accompanied by a fusillade of rifle-shots put an end to all doubt.

"Pirates!" O'Neil gasped as he dislodged an iron crowbar from a boat skid. "And there isn't a gun among us."

A bright glare suddenly darted from the bridge of the steamer as some one turned on the current for the search-light, and the Americans saw in the bright beam a motley crew of natives lining the lorcha's rail, their eager bodies crouched ready to spring upon the deck of their helpless victim.

"Tagalos," the girl cried out in sudden alarm as she instinctively put her small brother behind her, shielding him from the flying bullets.

"Don't do it, sir," O'Neil commanded hoarsely as Phil started precipitously forward.

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"We can't stand them off, we're too few. Here we can make a stand if they attack us. We can't save the ship."

The lads saw at once the wisdom in O'Neil's advice. No power could save the ship from the terrible onslaught of that savage horde. The two vessels came together with a mighty crash, and the air was rent with harsh cries of triumph as the captors leaped on board, firing their guns and slashing with their sharp bolos. The cries for mercy from the cringing crew were soon swallowed up in the shrieks of pain and anger as the vengeful victors satisfied their inherent love for blood.

The triumphant natives scaled the bridge deck, and in the bright glow from the search-light, the Americans were horrified to see those on the bridge, in spite of their hands held aloft in supplication, cruelly butchered where they stood.

The Americans in mortal dread pressed their bodies close within the deep shadow of the boats. The blinding glare from the search-light aided them in their attempt to hide from the searching eyes of their assailants. Phil and Sydney had manfully lifted

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the native girl and her brother into the boat behind them and stood their ground ready to protect them with their lives. So this was to be the end of their hopes for adventure?—to be butchered, unarmed and in cold blood by a band of lawless murderers.

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CHAPTER II

A POLITE CAPTOR

THE Americans were not kept long in suspense, although to the anxious boys, huddled helplessly in the shadow of the boat, the time seemed hours until the victorious and jubilant natives moved aft, bent on annihilating those whom they believed were hiding from their search.

O'Neil grasped his weapon firmly, while the lads made a mental resolve to seize the arms of the first natives within reach and sacrifice their own lives as dearly as possible.

Suddenly the beam of the search-light swung directly aft, revealing to the pirates the defenseless band of spectators to the recent tragedy.

The helpless passengers were confident now that all was over. As if in broad daylight, they were visible to the outlaws. A volley from their rifles would send them all to death.

Blinded by the bright light, they could but

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speculate as to the movement of their enemies, but they well knew that they must surely be advancing slowly, only awaiting the word to throw themselves on their helpless victims.

What could be done? Phil realized only too vividly that something must be done and quickly. A false move would condemn them all. Once those wild men, steeped in the blood of the innocent, had commenced, even the power of their leader could not stop them.

Then a girl's voice, clear and commanding from behind them, made the Americans gasp in wonder. O'Neil with his great club raised to strike the misty figures just beyond his reach stiffened. The girl's words were unintelligible to the Americans, but to the advancing natives they were like a flash of lightning from out of a clear sky. They stopped short, and for a few seconds a deep silence reigned. The girl was speaking in her native tongue. Phil cast a swift glance behind him; she stood boldly upright in the bow of the boat, like a beautiful bronze statue. The light threw her face in high relief against the

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black background of sky. He saw the flashing eyes, the quivering straight nostrils, and the scornful curve of her mouth. She finished speaking, and still the silence was unbroken. From the gathered crowd the leader advanced, his hand held above his head in mute sign of peace. Phil could scarcely believe his eyes, but the girl's low voice in his ear caused his heart to beat tumultuously.

"He has accepted your surrender." She spoke in Spanish. Then, with her hands placed lightly on Phil's shoulder she jumped down to the deck and advanced to meet the native leader. At a few paces from her he halted, and the Americans held their breath in wonder to see the bandit bow low before her, raising her hand to his lips. Then he turned and gave several harsh commands to his followers, who quietly dispersed.

Inside of but a few minutes the lorcha had disappeared in the night and the "Negros" resumed its journey, the noisy engines chugging away just as faithfully under their new masters.

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The Americans, as they gathered about the table to finish the meal long forgotten in the excitement of the attack, marveled at the outcome of the affair.

"Who can she be?" Sydney whispered. "Why, she orders the ladrone leader around as if she were a princess."

Phil was about to reply when the girl herself appeared from the shadows, followed by the native chief.

The lads regarded him with a mixture of feelings, admiration for his soldierly bearing and disgust at the thought of the wilful butchery they had seen him permit on the bridge of the steamer.

They recognized at once that these two were of the highest caste among their people. The man's face, almost perfect in contour, except in the cruel lines of the mouth, beamed hospitably upon them.

The girl spoke quickly, breathlessly.

"Colonel Martinez wishes to meet the brave Americans who would have fought unarmed against overwhelming odds and who had no thoughts of asking for quarter."

The Americans bowed, but the Filipino ad-

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vanced, his hand outstretched. Phil took it with almost a shudder. Why had this hand been withheld while the Spanish captain and his officers were asking for mercy scarcely five minutes before? Yet he knew that he had no choice but to take the proffered fingers; he and his companions were in the power of this man, the lines of whose mouth told what might happen if the native leader's pride was offended.

After shaking hands, Colonel Martinez went straight to the point. "You belong to the country of our enemy, and being such you must remain prisoners of war. We shall land at Dumaguete to-morrow, and if you will give me your solemn parole not to bear arms against us, I shall send you with an escort and safe conduct to Palilo. If not, I must send you to the headquarters of my superior, General Diocno."

Phil as spokesman bowed.

"We shall not give you our parole, colonel," he said emphatically. "We prefer to remain prisoners of war."

"As you will," the insurgent answered coldly, but his swarthy face betrayed his ad-

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miration. "I shall assure you of my good offices with our general. And now, I shall leave you, but I warn you that your lives will be in danger if you leave this deck, or if you make the slightest attempt to thwart my plans. I shall have your belongings brought back here. You see I can take no chances, and I appreciate that you three Americans are no mean antagonists." He cast a look of admiration at O'Neil, who had been listening in silence, his muscular fingers still clasping the stout crowbar with which he would like to have brained this pompous little Filipino.

"Beggars can't be choosers, Mr. Perry," O'Neil exclaimed with a wry smile after the officer had departed, "and I guess it was a good thing the girl knew how to get the ear of that there little bantam rooster. In another minute, I'd have brained one of them, and then those words she spoke would have had as much chance to be heard as the chairman's voice in a state convention."

The Americans' belongings were brought to them from their cabin by several evil-looking natives, and very soon all were comfortable under the awning, protected from the wind by

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the boat against which an hour ago they had been about to make their last stand.

The sun awakened the Americans at an early hour the next morning. While they were sipping their morning coffee, the lads gazed in admiration at the beautiful scenery about them. The little steamer had during the night wound its way past myriads of small islands, now but black smudges astern. The high mountains of Kapay Island rose boldly from the sea on their starboard hand. Ahead, becoming more distinct, was the shore line toward which the steamer was now traveling at an increased speed as told by the more rapid chugging of her engines.

"Hello," Phil exclaimed as he cast a glance toward the bridge, "something's happening."

Sydney and O'Neil followed his gaze. There on the bridge were Martinez and the native pilot, who had apparently been spared in the attack of the night before. Martinez was walking up and down excitedly, casting an anxious glance ever and again off on the port quarter.

It was O'Neil who was the first to discover

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the reason for the evident excitement of their captors.

"Smoke," he exclaimed laconically, characteristically jerking his thumb toward the islands astern fast being swallowed up in the glassy sea. "They ain't taking no chances. That stretch of shore yonder," he added, his gaze on the shore line ahead, "must be the mouth of the Davao River."

The lads gazed eagerly at the faint curl of smoke astern, but it gave them but scant encouragement, for it was only too evident that before the stranger, if it were one of the many small gunboats patrolling the islands, could hope to get within gunshot of the "Negros," the steamer would have crossed the shallow bar of the Davao River and be safe from the pursuit of the deeper vessel.

"If we could only stop her," Phil lamented. "Smash those rickety engines or haul fires in the boiler."

O'Neil in answer cast a comprehensive glance at the sentries on guard on the upper deck. The evil-looking natives were squatted in plain sight, their loaded rifles held tightly in their brown fingers.

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"Oh! for three good Krag rifles," Sydney cried petulantly; "we could clear this deck and then jam the steering gear there, and by the time they could overpower us the gunboat, if it is one, would make them heave to."

In a short time the girl and her brother joined them, and the native guards arose and moved farther away.

"It is one of your gunboats," she announced smiling mischievously at the evident pleasure of the midshipmen; "Colonel Martinez has recognized her through his telescope. She is giving chase, but Dumaguete is now scarcely twenty-five miles ahead, so I fear there will not be a rescue."

Phil calculated quickly. If Martinez could see the gunboat with his glass to recognize her she could not be over ten to twelve miles astern. The "Negros'" best speed was ten knots, which meant two and a half hours before she could reach the river bar. He knew that several of the gunboats were good for fifteen knots. If this were one of the fast ones, which he earnestly prayed it was, in two hours and a half the gunboat would be up to the

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"Negros." His face brightened as these figures awakened his hopes.

While the Americans went through the pretense of breakfast the "Negros" steamed swiftly toward the shore, and they saw with rising hopes the white hull of a large vessel raise itself slowly out of the deep blue of the tropical sea.

Phil eyed the Filipino girl questioningly. He could tell nothing from her sphynx-like face. Would she be glad to be rescued from this band of outlaws or was she at home and safe among them? The respect shown her by the leader and his men seemed to point to the conclusion that she was of importance among her people. He knew not what were those crisp words spoken the night before to prevent the fierce onslaught of the natives, but they had calmed the storm. She had saved their lives, that much was certain; and for that, even though she was at heart in sympathy with this band of pirates, he owed her his gratitude.

His whole heart rebelled against the thought of captivity among the insurgents. He knew it would be a living death. Poorly nourished and without the necessities of life; exposed to

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the savage temper of a people whose spirits fluctuated more rapidly than a tropical barometer, there seemed but little to live for. Perhaps death would be happier! His thoughts dwelt upon the stories he had heard of the atrocities committed by this same Diocno upon American soldiers who had been captured. Some of them he had buried alive in an ant-hill all but their heads, with their mouths propped open and a train of sugar leading to their swollen tongues. A cold shiver ran down his spine as his imagination pictured the agony of these men as they slowly died.

"It's the 'Albany,'" O'Neil cried joyfully a minute later, "and do you see the bone in her teeth? She's making nearly twenty knots. Why, it's all over but the shouting. These little yellow runts will look well when they are lined up against the wall at Cavite and shot for piracy."

Phil held up his hand to demand silence from the excited sailor. He did not know how much English the girl might know, and the ladrone leader might learn the dire wish of the sailorman for him and his followers. Then if the "Negros" escaped, his anger could

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be vented upon the Americans. But the girl's face did not betray that she had understood the meaning of O'Neil's words. The "Albany" was fast approaching, but Phil knew that O'Neil must be overestimating the cruiser's speed; the most she could make, without special preparation, would be fifteen knots, but, and his joy welled up into his eyes,—her six-inch guns! He had seen them fired with accuracy at four miles.

The shore line ahead had now become distinct. The deep cut in the surrounding hills betrayed the presence of the Davao River as it flowed through them to the sea. Groves of high-topped palm trees appeared, a deeper green against the emerald background, while the water stretching toward them from the land polluted the sea with a dull brown stain—the muddy water of the river. The town of Dumaguete could not be seen, but from the curls of rising smoke, Phil knew it must be beyond the first bend of the river and screened from view by the spur-like hill stretching its length from the mountains behind to the water's edge.

The girl sat between the two midshipmen,

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her small brother innocently unconscious of the tragedy being enacted about him, playing joyfully about the decks. Phil watched the child as a relief to his overanxious mind. He had dislodged a wedge-shaped block of wood from under the quarter boat, and was using it to frighten a large monkey which was eying him grotesquely from on top of the tattered awning. The monkey apparently did not enjoy the game, for he suddenly flew screeching at the boy, his mouth opened viciously. The boy in his haste to escape dropped the block of wood almost on Phil's foot and the midshipman determinedly placed his foot upon it. In that instant an idea had occurred to him. His pulse beat faster, as the thought flashed into his mind. He would use it as a last resort, even though it would bring the howling mob of natives vengefully about their heads.

"Now she's talking," O'Neil exclaimed grimly, as a flash and a puff of brownish smoke belched from the bow of the distant cruiser. The Americans arose to their feet, their eyes held fascinatingly on the cruiser. They knew that a hundred-pound shell was speed-

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ing toward them at a speed of a mile in three seconds. The Filipino girl sat unconcernedly sipping her coffee. She was as yet ignorant of the meaning of that flash from a vessel nearly five miles away.

Far astern a column of water arose in the air and the distant shock of the discharge came to their expectant ears.

Phil saw with sinking heart that the "Negros" had entered the discolored water from the river. Ahead less than two miles the ever-present bamboo fish weirs showed the commencement of the shallows of the Davao River. His hopes died within him. The cruiser was not making the speed he had hoped. She would hardly be in range before the "Negros" had put the high spur of land between her and the enemy. The cruiser, apparently seeing the quarry was about to escape, opened a rapid fire in hopes of intimidating or crippling its prey; but the range was too great. The shells hissed close to the stern of the fleeing vessel; the boasted accuracy of American gunners was lacking.

"If she was only a thousand yards closer," O'Neil cried in bitter disappointment. "It's

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only a matter of luck at this distance. Look out," he yelled as a shell struck the water with the noise of an express train, within fifty feet of the fleeing " Negros."

The Filipino girl's face blanched, while the boy ran cowering to his sister's side. The danger to them seemed almost supernatural. The girl's lips moved, and Phil saw that she was praying. For a moment a fear seized him. The thought of their danger was certainly unnerving. A single shell exploding near them would send them all to eternity. The fish weirs were now abreast the ship and the " Negros' " bow was being guided into the narrow, tortuous channel of the delta. The Filipino pilot on the bridge spun his steering wheel from side to side, following the twisting channel. The quadrant with its rusty chain, connecting the wheel and the rudder, clanked loudly at Phil's feet. Now was the time to put his daring plan in operation. He saw that the four guards had taken refuge behind the boats, from which they peered out with frightened eyes at the oncoming cruiser, dodging out of sight at each screech of a shell. They had apparently forgotten the prisoners whom

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they were guarding, for their rifles and belts were resting on the hatch several yards away.

"When I give the word, you jump for those rifles and belts," Phil said in a low, intense voice, glancing covertly at the terrified girl at his side. "I am going to jam the steering quadrant. When you get the guns," he continued, "take cover behind the boats. It may cost us our lives, but anything is better than imprisonment among these people."

O'Neil and Sydney breathed a gasping assent to the bold plan. Phil watched carefully the quadrant; he saw it move slowly over until it was hard astarboard. He reached down, grasping the boy's block of wood under his foot, then slid it slowly, amid the terrific noise of a passing shell, toward the quadrant. He knew the wedge would hold the rudder over and the "Negros," unable to steer, would ground on the edge of the channel, thus leaving her helpless to be captured by the cruiser. He opened his mouth to give the signal for his companions to act, when a shrill warning cry sounded in his ears and he was roughly drawn back into his chair and the wedge dropped from his hands a foot from its goal.

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CHAPTER III

A LEAK OF MILITARY INFORMATION

BRIGADIER-GENERAL WILSON sat at his desk in the headquarters building at Palilo. In the spacious corridors outside orderlies hurried to and fro, carrying messages from the several officers of the staff whose offices joined that of the general.

Before him was a chart of his military district, and while he pondered he juggled a score or more of different colored pins with little tags attached to them. Those pins with blue heads represented soldiers of his command in the field against the enemy while the ones with the green heads were the ladrones or insurrectos, whom he had been fighting without success for nearly six months.

"They jump about as if they were mounted in balloons," he exclaimed testily as he drew out several green-headed pins and replaced them in accordance with recent information

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in other localities on the map. The big headquarters clock ticked away in silence, while the gray-haired veteran again lapsed into thought over his problem.

"Here are two regiments in the field," he complained querulously; "Gordon with two companies at San Juan, Baker with a company at Binalbagan, Anderson and a battalion at Barotoc, Huse and a company at Estancia, Pollard with two companies at Kapiz, Shanks with three companies at Carles, Stewart with his rough-riders at Dumangas and Bane with his two battalions as a flying column. That ought to give us some results, and yet what have we to show for it?"

The general raised his thoughtful eyes, as his orderly's step sounded on the soft matting at his side.

"A telegram," he exclaimed with a show of interest. "Tell Major Marble I wish to see him," he added, tearing open the yellow envelope.

"Whew!" he whistled in sudden consternation as he read the unwelcome message. "They not only avoided Gordon but attacked San Juan in his absence, cutting up ten of his

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men left to guard the town. This thing has got to be stopped. There is a leak somewhere and I am going to put my hand on it before I send out another expedition."

He pushed the chart back on his desk and rose suddenly to his feet.

"Major," he cried as the adjutant-general's active figure entered the office, "we are all a set of ninnies. Don't start and look indignant, sir," he added in mock severity. "You are as bad as the rest, but Blynn there is the worst of us all, for he can't do what he's employed to do—you and I are only plain, blunt soldiers, while he is supposed," with fine scorn, "to be in addition lawyer and detective; a regular secret service sleuth and all that.

"Here, read that," he ended throwing the telegram on the desk. "You see it's the same old story, and ten more men butchered through our stupidity."

The general paced up and down his office with quick, energetic steps.

"I've a good mind to go out in the field myself," he exclaimed, half to himself. "I am tired of these silly, costly blunders." Then

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he glanced through the open door into the next office to his own. "Come here, Blynn!" he hailed.

A stout, dark-visaged officer arose from a desk littered with countless papers and came energetically toward him.

The older officer's eyes roamed searchingly over his judge-advocate general's strong, massive frame; he gazed with kindling eyes at the bronzed cheeks, the unbending directness of his black eyes, the firm set to the bulldog jaws. Here surely was no weakling. He waved his hand toward the adjutant-general, standing in stunned silence, the telegram crumpled in his hand.

"That may interest you," the general exclaimed as he turned away.

"The information was first hand, sir," Captain Blynn's bass voice insisted after he had straightened the paper and read the unwelcome message. "There's been a leak."

"Of course there's been a leak," the general announced hotly, "any idiot would see that, but where? Where? that's the question!"

Captain Blynn returned to his desk and drew out a bundle of papers from a locked

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drawer. He glanced over them hurriedly. Every word was familiar to him. Could he have made a mistake? Every witness whom he had examined had given the same information. These natives had not been coerced; they had come to him of their own volition. Espinosa had vouched for each. Then he stopped, the papers fell from his hand to the desk. No! it could not be possible! Espinosa was surely loyal. That much was sure. For the space of a minute he was lost in thought. "I shall test him," he muttered, while he pressed a bell at his side.

"Tell Señor Espinosa over the telephone that I shall call on him in an hour on important business," he instructed the orderly who answered his summons.

An hour later Captain Blynn mounted the high stairs of the wealthy Filipino's dwelling.

"Buenos Dias, El Capitan," Señor Manuel Espinosa cried delightedly as he pushed a chair forward for his visitor. But the smile died quickly on the native's face as Captain Blynn waved away the chair impatiently, almost rudely, and in his typical way jumped into the very midst of the matter in hand.

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"Señor," he exclaimed angrily, "I've been betrayed! Do you understand?" he cried menacingly, his flashing eyes fixed on the crafty face opposite him, while he shook his big, strong fist before the eyes of the startled Presidente of Palilo. "Betrayed, that's the word, and if I can lay my hand on the hound, I'll swing him to the eaves of his own housetop."

Señor Espinosa was silent, his crafty, beadlike eyes regarding closely the angry, excited face of the judge-advocate.

"Captain Gordon went on a wild-goose chase, and when he returned he found the insurgents had been in San Juan in his absence. Ten soldiers, American men, were caught, trapped, and butchered. The natives who brought me the information were vouched for by you and now you've got to prove to me that you're not a sneaking traitor!"

The captain's words tumbled one after another so fast that the little Filipino could grasp only half their meaning, but the last could not be misunderstood. His brown face turned a sickly yellow, while his frightened eyes sought instinctively for some weapon of defense from

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this terrible American, who was strong enough to tear his frail body limb from limb.

"Ah, señor capitan, is this your much-boasted American justice?" he gasped in a weak voice. "Am I then judged guilty without hearing my defense?" His voice became stronger as he proceeded. "Let us look over this calmly," he begged. "I, myself, have been betrayed. In embracing the American cause, I have made many enemies among my people. I live constantly in fear of assassination." He stopped abruptly, his voice choking and his eyes filled with tears of self-pity.

Captain Blynn had dealt with many different classes of men in his twenty odd years of service. He had been a terror to the ruffians on the Western frontier where he had been stationed during the several Indian wars. The "bad men" had said when they had found Blynn against them, "We might as well own up—we can't fool Blynn."

But here was a case that baffled him. In the hour before going to this house he had after deep thought believed that after all Espinosa was a traitor, and he had avowedly intended to force him to confess his treason; but

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now in spite of these resolves, the captain was weakening. After all might not the Filipino be innocent? At all events he would listen to his defense.

Captain Blynn dropped his muscular hands, which had been creeping menacingly toward the thin yellow throat of the Presidente, and sat down suddenly in the chair which the native had previously offered him.

"Go on!" he ordered harshly. "I'll suspend judgment, but remember, if you can't prove your innocence, I'll give you water. Do you understand, water! I've never given it, and I don't believe in it, but if you can't show me how these men were butchered, I'll fill you up to the neck with it."

Espinosa wetted his lips with his tongue and swallowed hard, but the captain by taking the proffered chair had removed the native from the terrifying influence of those powerful twitching fingers which he had seen ready to throttle him, and he, in proportion to the distance away of the cause of his fear, grew bolder.

"The señor capitan must know of my sincerity," he pleaded in a weak voice.

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"Have I not taken the oath of allegiance to the United States? Do I not know the punishment for breaking that oath?"

Captain Blynn nodded his head. "Go ahead," he commanded impatiently; "cut that out, give me the unvarnished story."

"The information which I gave you and which was sworn to by three witnesses came from Juan Rodriguez," Espinosa continued, dropping his voice to a whisper and approaching closer to the American. Then he stopped and glanced covertly at his listener's startled face.

"Juan Rodriguez!" the judge-advocate general exclaimed half rising in his excitement. "Then you believe that he has deliberately furnished false information of the insurgents' movements?"

While the two were talking a servant brought refreshments, which the army man waved impatiently aside. Espinosa helped himself and as he did so he followed his servant's eye to a tightly rolled piece of paper inside the salva. He drew it out hastily, unrolling it in silence, feeling rather than seeing the captain's eyes upon him, then he read the

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few lines written therein. Here was a chance to redeem his good name or at least save himself for this time from the fierce American. He asked a question in the native language and received a monosyllabic answer.

"This is very important," he exclaimed suddenly turning to the American officer. His voice was now joyful, full of confidence. "Two hundred riflemen have landed at Dumaguete from Luzon. To-night they will be encamped on a hill near Banate. You can attack them there before they can join Diocno."

Captain Blynn jumped to his feet, reaching out for the paper; he took it, scrutinizing it closely—then stuck it quietly into his pocket. Espinosa held out a trembling hand, bent upon regaining the note, but Captain Blynn had turned away, picking up his hat and whip from the table behind him.

"I shall myself go in command of this expedition," he announced gruffly as he moved toward the stairs, "and I shall expect you to accompany me, señor. We shall start at sunset."

Señor Espinosa feebly murmured his willingness, and after waiting to see the burly

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figure of his visitor pass out through the wide entrance, he turned and called for his servant.

"Tell the messenger I will speak to him," he said as the muchacho noiselessly entered.

A moment later a ragged native stood tremblingly before him, twisting his dirty head-covering in his nervous hands.

Espinosa seated himself luxuriously in the chair recently vacated by Captain Blynn. He had now regained his old confidence and cruel arrogance, while he fired question after question at the uncomfortable native.

The Presidente sat motionless in his chair long after his messenger had gone. His servant came noiselessly into the room several times but tiptoed away, believing his master was asleep. But Espinosa was far from sleep, his brain was actively at work. How could he hold his position and yet remain undiscovered to this terrible Captain Blynn? He shuddered as he remembered those big hands as they worked longingly to grasp his slender neck. He was not a fighting man; the inheritance of his father's Chinese blood mixed with the cruelty in the native strain qualified

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him only for plotting. Others could do the fighting. His brain and cunning would furnish them the means and opportunity. But Rodriguez—he was too honest, and knew too much ; he stood a menacing figure in his path as the leader of his people. He had, however, set the train of powder on fire, and now he would watch it burn. Once Rodriguez was removed there were no others strong enough to thwart him. Even Diocno bowed to his superior sagacity. Then he could cast off this halter that he felt tightening about his neck. With Diocno and Rodriguez out of the way, he could make terms with these childlike Americans, and then with his fortune made shake the dust of the islands forever from his feet.

An hour before sunset he arose and dressed himself for his ride, ordering his servant to have his horse ready. The messenger had three hours' start ; that would insure the escape of the Tagalos. Captain Blynn would find that his information was true. He could not blame him if the enemy had taken alarm and fled. As for the other matter, if the Americans would only arrest Rodriguez he

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would see that he did not interfere with his cherished plans for power. As he buckled on his English made leggings, he whistled gaily an old Spanish air, one he had heard in Spain; in his mind he saw the brightly lighted theatre, the richly dressed people in the boxes. Some day he would be rich and he would then be able to recline in a gilded box and cast disdainful glances at an admiring crowd.

His joy would have been indeed short-lived and his castles in Spain would have fallen as flat as the surface of the sea on a calm day if he could have known that at that moment his messenger was lying dead in the trail but half way to his destination, suddenly overcome by the terrible scourge of the camp, cholera.

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CHAPTER IV

LANDED IN CAPTIVITY

PHIL was too angry and humiliated to do more than glare at the girl who had so cleverly thwarted him in his daring plan to strand the steamer. His companions had started to spring toward the coveted rifles of their enemy, but now they sank back into their seats and hopelessly looked into the menacing muzzles of these same rifles in the hands of the four aroused sentries. The girl had risen to her feet, her face flushed with excitement; she raised her hand to the natives, motioning them to put up their weapons.

Phil scrambled to his feet and sheepishly dropped again into his chair. His breathing was quick and his eyes dilated with suppressed rage and mortification. At that moment he could have quite forgotten his natural instinct of gallantry and would have taken pleasure in throttling this slight girl who had come between them and freedom.

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"They would have all been shot," she said in quick accents of excitement. "You see I can understand a little English. I could not be a traitor to my own blood as long as I had power to prevent it."

For answer Phil gave her a look of loathing.

The girl recoiled under his menacing glance.

"I am sorry for you," she hastened to add, "for now Colonel Martinez will have to keep you closer prisoners, unless you give me your word that you will not again try to prevent the escape of the steamer."

Phil shook his head savagely, his eyes on the steering quadrant within easy reach of his hand. The girl waited breathlessly for an answer, then finding none was forthcoming she gave a sharp command in her own language and immediately the four sentries closed in around the Americans, their rifles pointed toward their prisoners.

"For goodness' sake, Phil," Sydney exclaimed in an agony of doubt, "don't be foolhardy. We are absolutely in their power. See," he cried desperately, "the 'Albany' has stopped and sheered away. She has given up the chase."

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Phil realized that Sydney was right—nothing could be gained by giving in to his rash anger. He saw that O'Neil had dropped the crowbar and had been led away by two of the natives, going as peacefully as a lamb. However his pride stood in the way of an outward surrender, and instead of agreeing to make no attempts to disable the steamer he arose and moved away from the tempting steering quadrant.

The "Negros" had meanwhile threaded her way among the dangerous shoals and was now in the river; the cruiser had disappeared behind the land.

A great crowd of natives ashore had witnessed the escape of the steamer from the warship and these lined the banks of the river shouting joyfully as the "Negros" steamed quietly to the bamboo pier in front of the village.

As soon as the dock had been reached, the girl dismissed the guards and the Americans once more gathered about the breakfast table.

A few moments later Colonel Martinez, his face wreathed in smiles, left the bridge and joined them.

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"You are to be given the freedom of the town," he said as he took a cup of coffee from the servant's hands and sipped it gratefully, "but I warn you if you attempt to escape you will be shot, and even if you escaped, without guides you would be lost in the jungle and be killed by ladrones."

Phil bowed his head in sign of submission. They were certainly prisoners, without hope of rescue.

"To-morrow morning," Colonel Martinez added, "we shall leave the village and march inland. I have already sent to notify our leader that I have successfully arrived. I think for your own good it would be wiser for you to remain on board here until we start. I do not trust the temper of the people. Americans are not just now in favor." He finished with an amused smile on his face.

After their captors had left them, the three terribly disappointed men sat bemoaning their fate.

"We might just as well make the best of it," Sydney philosophically assured the others. "There certainly isn't any way to

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escape that I can see. After all, we've been in just as tight places and have come out of them; we don't make matters any better by crying over spilled milk."

"If that girl hadn't betrayed us," Phil moaned, "we would have been on board the 'Albany' this minute."

"Mr. Perry," O'Neil broke in apologetically, "it ain't like you to be unfair to anybody, most of all a woman. These are her own people—Colonel Martinez must be a friend of hers, or otherwise we wouldn't have been living to see the 'Albany.' If she had only been an ordinary native girl, these ladrones wouldn't have stopped and bowed and scraped and then given us the freedom of the after deck of the ship. No, sir, she's a person of consequence. She saved our lives and then afterward she saved the lives of Colonel Martinez and his band of cutthroats, for if they had fallen into the hands of the crew of the 'Albany' they would have all been shot or swung at her yard-arm. Seizing this merchant ship and killing her captain is piracy."

"I think O'Neil is right," Sydney exclaimed patting the sailor on the back enthusi-

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astically. "The girl's all right—I'll take my hat off to her every time."

"It was my own stupidity, I suppose," Phil declared, his face sobering slightly. "I thought she was too frightened to know what was happening; in fact I really didn't believe she would understand what I intended doing."

"Who do you suppose she is?" Sydney asked eagerly. "Isn't it queer she has never told us her name?"

"It probably wouldn't aid us if she had," Phil replied; "she's probably the daughter of some rich Filipino, who holds a fat position under our civil government. By the way she talked when we first met her I thought she was dead against war, yet she appears to know and welcome these cutthroat Tagalos with open arms."

"There you go, Phil," Sydney admonished, "unfair again. She has so far shown herself willing to help both sides. In your heart, when you've recovered from your disappointment and humiliation at being handled so roughly by a girl, you'll see that she acted in a way that was just to both the insurgents and ourselves."

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The next morning at daylight the Americans were up and dressed, ready for the march with their captors.

"Colonel Martinez has secured enough horses for you and your companions to ride," the girl told them as a half dozen small Filipino ponies were led down to the end of the wharf. "Your belongings will be carried by natives whom he has secured, so I hope you will not be put to too great hardships. The soldiers are used to marching, but for those unaccustomed to the country it is very tedious."

Phil thanked her not ungraciously. He had during many hours of a sleepless night brooded over the situation and had awakened with much kindlier thoughts for this girl than he had held the night before.

The Americans, with Colonel Martinez, the girl and her brother rode at the head of the long file of armed insurgent soldiers. As the procession passed through the streets of the town the natives gathered and gave excited and enthusiastic yells of pleasure. Great curiosity was shown as to the white captives, but Colonel Martinez took precautions that

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they should not be disturbed by the evident dislike of the people. Phil read hatred in many eyes as they wended their way through the curious crowds, and he quite believed the insurgent colonel's words that they would not be safe among them.

The trail which they were following led steadily inland, and constantly climbed above the level of the sea. After a few miles had been covered all signs of habitation disappeared, the country was bleak and barren of cultivation. At first they had passed through groves of cocoanut, banana and many varieties of tropical fruit trees and afterward the velvety green of rice fields lay on either hand, but now the earth was scorched and brown, the high jungle bush lay thick on either side of the trail. The Americans realized the hardships of a campaign in such a country against a wild and determined foe. They had marched for about four hours without a rest when a signal of warning was given from scouts in front. The leader stopped, giving a low order to a soldier at his elbow.

"What is it?" Phil breathed, forcing his pony forward eagerly.

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"They've seen something," O'Neil whispered; "probably a company of our soldiers on a 'hike.'"

The Americans were ordered to dismount, and a dozen riflemen quietly surrounded them. Colonel Martinez spurred ahead while the entire band dissolved in the jungle, leaving the trail clear. Scarcely twenty feet from the trail the Americans were roughly seized, their hands secured tightly behind their backs and gags were forced into their mouths. They submitted peaceably. Suddenly, scarcely fifty yards away, a column of khaki-clad soldiers appeared marching down the trail. Phil caught a glimpse through a vista in the dense brush of these men, swinging lightly along, ignorant of the presence, so near them, of over two hundred armed enemies. His pulse beat fast and his heart seemed ready to burst within him. Were these Americans walking innocently into an ambush? He tried to scream a warning, but he emitted no sound save a faint gurgle, which his guards heard, and for his pains struck him down with their knees until he lay with his face pressed close to the prickly

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earth. He could hear the tramp of shod feet and an occasional snatch of a song. Once he heard a sharp command in English and at another time a jest which called forth local laughter. It seemed an age since he had seen the head of this column appear, and yet the earth trembled under the tread of a multitude of feet. Finally the sounds died away. The soldiers had passed, and no attack had been made. After a long hour of waiting their guards brought out the Americans and unbound their hands, taking out the cruel gags from their mouths. Colonel Martinez appeared, still mounted upon his small gray pony.

"I am very sorry," he said politely, "but I could not run the risk of detection. That was Colonel Bane with two battalions of the Seventy-eighth Infantry. I had been warned that he was in the neighborhood. I was not strong enough to attack him."

Phil could have cried aloud at the utter uselessness of this warfare. Their movements heralded far and wide whenever a column moved, in a country well-nigh impenetrable, how were the Americans ever to put down this ugly rebellion?

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At sunset the band halted and went into camp. Phil saw that the site selected was a strong one and one that could be easily defended from attack if the attackers came by trail, and there seemed no other way through the impenetrable brush.

"We shall remain here until my messenger returns," Phil overheard Colonel Martinez say to the girl. "Will you wait until your father sends for you, or will you accept an escort from me?"

"I shall remain here," she said; "the morning should bring my own people."

Shortly afterward the girl took her brother's hand and led him away to the part of the camp that had been set aside for her own use, and Colonel Martinez joined the disconsolate Americans.

"The señorita," he said as he sat down on the ground near Phil, "has told me of the brave conduct of my prisoners, and I wish it were in my power to set you free. I have known many American navy men before this war began and my treatment by them has always been courteous and considerate. I have the power to take your parole, and knowing

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the hardships which you must undergo as prisoners among our soldiers I advise you to give it. To-morrow morning you can be on your way to Palilo."

It was certainly a grave temptation, but the midshipmen knew that in giving their parole all hopes of taking part in the war would vanish; and then, the insurgents not being recognized as belligerents, the Navy Department might even see fit to order them to break their parole.

"Thank you, señor," Phil finally replied. "We shall take our chances as your prisoners. We shall always remember your considerate treatment of us, and if by the chances of war the situation is reversed you can count on us to repay our obligations to a chivalrous enemy."

"If you and your companions were to remain in my keeping," the Filipino answered, a pleased smile on his face at Phil's subtle compliment, "I should have no concern, but I must give you over to the mercies of General Diocno; he is a Tagalo, and has known nothing but war since his youth; he would never surrender to the Spaniards, and for years

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a price has been upon his head; he is said to be cruel to those who fall into his hands."

Phil shuddered at the frank words of his captor. He saw in the earnestness of his face that this gruesome information was being given for the Americans' own good.

"Your friends," the colonel continued, "will doubtless attempt a rescue, and that will only add to your danger."

After Colonel Martinez had said good-night Phil told his companions of the unpleasant and disquieting reports concerning their future captor, but nothing could shake O'Neil's good spirits.

"It's all in the game, Mr. Perry," he said philosophically. "They can't do more than kill us, and as we've got to die some day, it might just as well be in Kapay as any other place. But as long as we've got our senses and our strong arms, there are going to be some little brown men hurt before I give up my mess number.

"What I've been trying to study out," the sailor continued, seeing the two lads still silent, "is how all those American soldiers could pass along that trail and not find out

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that this band of natives had just left it. Where are all the old Indian fighters we used to have in the army?"

Phil and Sydney both raised their heads, a look of surprise in their faces.

"I hadn't thought of that," Sydney exclaimed. "Our trail must have been there; the native soldiers all go barefooted and leave but indistinct tracks on this hard soil, but our pony tracks must have been in plain sight."

"The solution is," Phil broke in sadly, "those men were volunteers, the Seventy-eighth Infantry, the colonel said; there probably wasn't an old soldier among them. They fight like demons when they see the enemy, but are as helpless as children against a savage foe skilled in woodcraft. If that had been a battalion of regulars there'd have been a fight and we would now be free, or," he added with an unconscious shiver, "dead there in the jungle, for the native guarding me would have been only too happy to stick his bolo into me."

O'Neil had already rolled himself in his blanket, apparently resigned to the tricks of fate, and the midshipmen, realizing, after their

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long day's ride in spite of their troubled minds, that they were in need of rest, were soon comfortably settled on the bundles of dry grass given them to lie upon. As Phil dropped into a troubled sleep, he was conscious of the four native guards, pacing to and fro just outside of ear-shot. These four men were all that stood between them and liberty ; for once they had escaped, he felt confident that O'Neil could be depended upon to follow the track of those half a thousand soldiers who had marched past so carelessly only a few hours before.

After what seemed an incredibly short time, although he had slept for hours, he awakened with a start ; sitting bolt upright, he gazed quickly about him. A faint streak of light in the eastern sky told him the night had nearly passed. His brain, keenly alive, grasped for a reason ; what had stirred him to wakefulness ? All was quiet about the camp. The guards were no longer on their feet, but he could see their shadowy forms squatting on the ground, their rifles in their hands. With a disappointed sigh, for what he did not know, he dropped back upon his bundle of straw,

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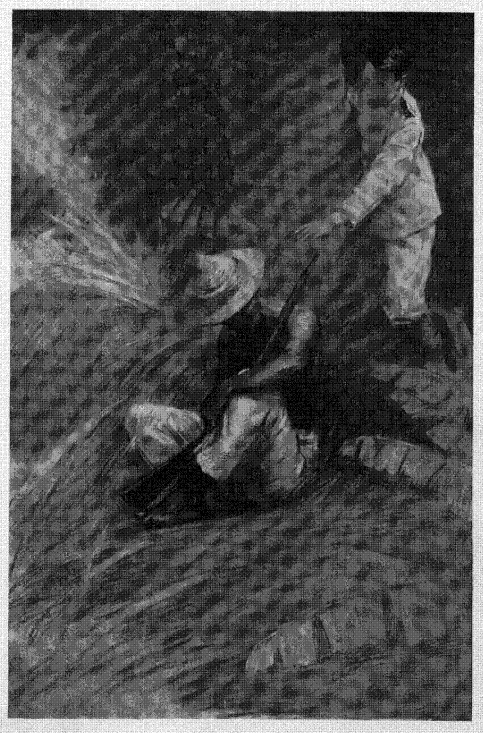

HERE WAS FREEDOM WITHIN HIS GRASP

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but he soon found he was too wide awake for more sleep. He finally arose, stretching himself as though just awakened, and by an impulse which he was powerless to disobey, walked slowly toward the guards. As he advanced he saw with surprise that they did not move. Stealthily he went on until he stood over the nearest one, squatting naturally, the butt of his rifle between his bare feet. The guard was sound asleep. Farther on he saw in the dim mysterious light of early dawn that the other three were also silently sleeping, their bodies propped up against the trunks of the dwarf pine-trees. Phil's heart beat fast. Here was freedom within his grasp. He leaned forward, seizing the rifle barrel of an unconscious guard, drawing it slowly from his relaxed fingers. The butt still rested between his feet and as he slowly, steadily drew the rifle toward him, the sleeping native's body settled itself inch by inch upon the ground.

A twig snapped close by, sending the blood coursing through his veins while his hand shook from the sudden start. Terrified he cast his startled eyes into the jungle behind him. The dim shadow of a man stood scarcely a

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hundred yards away, silently watching him. In the dim light the figure seemed of heroic size. He retreated toward it and back to his sleeping companions, the rifle clasped in his hand. Then suddenly the silence was broken by a volley of rifle-shots and the hiss of bullets sounded everywhere about him. Stunned, unable to explain the meaning of this, he dropped to the ground and lay silent, his face in the straw of his bed. The next second a line of shouting, excited khaki-clad men streamed past, firing their rifles as they charged upon their hidden native foes.

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CHAPTER V

CAPTAIN BLYNN MARCHES

As night fell, Captain Blynn led his battalion of regulars from their barracks, across the bridge and on to the trail leading to the northward of Palilo. The American officer rode in the lead, the Filipino Presidente at his side. The soldiers behind him, eight full companies, each under its own officer, swung along with the long, untiring step of the American soldier. They each knew that before the night was over and the sun had lifted its fiery head above the misty mountains to the eastward twenty miles of rough trail must be covered, and then they had been promised to be brought face to face with an enemy whose shadows they had chased during these many long, tiresome months.

Espinosa, as he rode in silence by the side of the big American, chuckled inwardly at the fruitlessness of this expedition. "These child-

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like American dogs," he thought, "they will arrive in time to see the smouldering fires where our men have cooked their morning rice, while they will be high in the hills, looking down on them derisively, and possibly will fire a few shots at long range to show their contempt."

Captain Blynn's restless gaze contemplated his companion from time to time as the native signaled the right trail. They were now in a narrow defile between two hills that rose precipitously to a height of over a thousand feet. Captain Blynn, as he contemplated his surroundings with a soldier's eyes, drew his revolver from its holster and laid it gently across the pommel of his saddle.

"A nice place for an ambush," he said in a low, insinuating voice. "I suppose, señor, you are prepared to stand before your Maker."

The native shuddered. He saw only too clearly the accusation and threat in this terrible American's words. If there was to be an ambush, he knew nothing of it, but if a single hostile shot was fired, he would pay the penalty with his life.

The Filipino forced an uneasy laugh. "As

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far as I know, señor capitan, there are no insurgents this side of Banate."

"For your sake, I hope you are right," the American replied. "As you see, I am taking no chances. You are our guide; if you get us into trouble, you pay, that's all."

Captain Blynn ordered a halt and called a lieutenant from the leading company.

"Take ten men, Simpson," he said, "and act as the point. If you are attacked, retreat and fall back on the main body."

Lieutenant Simpson picked his men quickly and disappeared quietly down the trail. Captain Blynn watched them until swallowed up in the darkness, and then set the long line in motion again. Every soldier took, instinctively, a tighter grip upon his musket, and loosened the sharp sword bayonet from its scabbard. Each knew that when "Black Jack" Blynn took precautions there was reason to scent trouble.

Half-way through the defile a guarded whistle of warning came to Blynn's ears from the point. As one man the long column halted; the soldiers' heavy breathing was distinctly audible above the tremor of the me-

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tallic rattling of accoutrements. Each soldier sought his neighbor's face for a key to the solution of the problem. Blynn, motioning Espinosa to follow, rode silently forward. In the trail a hundred paces ahead he saw Lieutenant Simpson bending over a dark object.

"What is it?" Blynn asked in a harsh whisper.

"A dead native," Simpson answered shortly. Espinosa was off his horse instantly; bending down quickly he struck a match, illuminating the native's dead face. He started, turning a sickly yellow. His heart stopped beating, and his knees shook under him, but Captain Blynn was too much occupied with the silent figure to notice the peculiar behavior of his guide. They turned the dead man over, revealing the terrible havoc accomplished in but a few hours by the tropical scourge.

"Poor chap!" Blynn exclaimed. "Only a common 'Tao' stricken by cholera and dead before he knew what had hit him."

They moved the body off the trail, and again the command was set in motion.

In the flash of the match Espinosa had

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recognized his messenger although his face was horribly disfigured by his last mortal suffering. He shuddered at the consequences of this man's death—Martinez would not get his warning message and would fall into the trap set for him. He, Espinosa, could never explain his actions. He would doubtless pay for this treachery with his life. But his cruel mind was instantly made up as to his future actions. He feared this American too thoroughly not to take them to the place where the Tagalos under Martinez were encamped; above all else Captain Blynn must be made to believe that he was sincere; all depended upon that. Everything must be sacrificed for his final great ambition. Martinez would not be taken alive. That was a necessity, he would see to that. Once he was killed his part in the night's expedition must remain a secret among the Americans.

Casting from him his first fears he straightened his slight frame and rode boldly, with head erect, beside the American leader.

One hour before sunrise Captain Blynn disposed his command in a single circular line about the base of a high hill its sides

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were covered with a dense jungle while a single trail led to the top.

Under the guardianship of Espinosa the command moved forward, straight up through the high clutching brush; the men were so close to each other that their neighbors on each side were always in sight. Captain Blynn and one company marched fearlessly up the trail. A few feet from where the round top hill had been cleared he halted and waited for the remainder of his men to join him. His enemy's camp was silent, but his keen eyes could discern shadowy forms lying prone on the ground. He searched for a sentry, but no movement could be seen. Were they all asleep, believing themselves secure in their surroundings? No! there directly in front of him he saw a white figure standing upright beside a dark form on the ground. This must be an officer, for the native soldiers do not wear white—something familiar in the pose and cut of the uniform struck him. Could it be possible, was it a navy uniform? At that instant the soldiers on both sides reached the edge of the clearing. As yet the enemy were unaware of their

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presence. Not a moment must be lost; they must attack at once. Firing his revolver, Captain Blynn plunged forward, straight toward the white-clad figure. Several of his men passed him while he stopped to find why the figure had thrown itself face downward in the grass at the discharge of his revolver.

The next moment he was shaking hands with three almost tearfully joyful fellow countrymen.

As soon as Phil realized that they were again free his thoughts were for the Filipino girl and her little brother. Was she in danger? With the rifle he had taken from the sentry in his hands, he rushed anxiously in the direction that he believed she might be found. He recognized some of her belongings on the ground at his feet, but the girl had vanished. Fearful at the thought of finding them killed by his own people, he sought her everywhere, repeatedly risking his life as the terrified natives, finding themselves trapped, flung at him with their long, sharp knives or discharged their weapons almost in his face. He gave them but little

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heed, not giving a thought to the reason why he had not been killed, although a faithful sailor at his elbow was the only tangible cause. A score of times O'Neil had saved his young officer at the risk of his own life.

A small group of struggling men on the right near the edge of the jungle suddenly caught his restless eye and desperately he plunged downward toward them. On the ground two men struggled in a death embrace, while the girl and her brother stood wild-eyed with fright, unwilling spectators to the fierce duel. Phil gave a gasp of relief as he stood beside the girl. The two combatants uttered no sound save their sharp gasps for breath while they struggled for supremacy. Phil saw with wonder that the men were both natives and then for the first time realized that they were alone; no soldier was within a hundred yards of them. Behind them the soldiers were relentlessly, stubbornly herding the natives into a mass of flashing, frenzied humanity at the top of the hill.

"It is Colonel Martinez," the girl gasped seizing Phil's arm. "Oh, save him, señor,

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he will be murdered." Phil saw the other native, by an effort almost superhuman, free his right arm, and in it a bright blade flashed in the dim light. The girl's appealing face looked into his for an instant, and the next moment the lad had thrown himself between the two men; seizing the hand with the knife he bent it slowly backward, finally wrenching it from its firm grasp. O'Neil was beside him. The sailor caught the two natives as if they had been fighting dogs and held them for a second in his powerful arms clear of the ground. Espinosa fell limply as the sailor released his hold, and lay breathing heavily, too exhausted for speech. Colonel Martinez quickly regained his revolver, and was immediately the man of action. He gazed boldly at the Americans, his revolver held menacingly, and the while edging slowly away from his captors. Phil turned his eyes to the figure on the ground and the angry glare he received disconcerted him; the next second as he looked about him he saw that Colonel Martinez had gone; from the gloom of the jungle he heard the rustle of brush and caught a glimpse of misty forms. He

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raised his rifle half-way and then lowered it. In his heart he rejoiced that he had not taken him prisoner.

In the next second Espinosa leaped toward him. Phil was stunned by a stinging blow; but before it could be repeated O'Neil interposed and Espinosa had measured his length on the ground.

"Where did Colonel Martinez go?" Phil asked quietly.

"I didn't see," O'Neil answered, his face as solemn as that of a judge.

Phil smiled and put out his hand. The two men exchanged clasps. "I believe he would have done as much for us," Phil said.

Before the sun had risen above the sea to the eastward, the fight was over. But few of the enemy had escaped. Asking no quarter, fighting to the last man, they had died as they had lived. Two hundred rifles were the spoils of the fight.

Captain Blynn and the midshipmen were seated after their victory on the bloody battlefield, while the lads gave a hurried account of their capture.

Suddenly from the grass a horribly dis-

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figured face confronted them. It was Espinosa. His cunning gave him counsel that he must control his ungovernable temper. He could gain nothing by accusing these Americans of wilfully aiding Martinez in his escape. "I am sorry to inform you, señor captain, that Colonel Martinez escaped. These gentlemen can tell you the details. I was about to kill him. They doubtless had good reasons for permitting him to escape."

Captain Blynn turned quickly to the midshipmen, a surprised look on his face at the words of his guide.

"Is this true?" he asked angrily.

Phil felt as he had before the court martial that had tried him for disobeying orders.

"I alone am to blame, captain," the lad replied quietly, after an effort. "I saw these two men on the ground and separated them, seeing they were both natives. This man attacked me afterward, so of course he was knocked down."

"But it was Colonel Martinez! His capture is worth far more than all these men and rifles," the captain exclaimed angrily, pointing to the heaps of slain being laid side

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by side in the narrow trench dug by the soldiers.

"He escaped," Phil said, his throat dry, but his eyes looking fearlessly into those of the enraged officer.

"You will have to explain this, sir," Captain Blynn cried hoarsely, cutting short any explanation. "You are under my command here. If you have deliberately allowed this man to escape, I shall prosecute you to the utmost of my power, and you know the articles of war sufficiently to understand the penalty for such an unauthorized act."

Phil was stunned; but his conscience had acquitted him of all guilt.

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CHAPTER VI

THE "MINDINAO"

CAPTAIN BLYNN rested his tired soldiers until the cool of the evening and then the march was begun back to Palilo, carrying with them the spoils of the fight.

The judge-advocate general, in spite of the complete victory, was not friendly to the Americans whom he had rescued from a torturing captivity. The escape of the Filipino leader, Colonel Martinez, was indeed a severe blow to his pride. Both Sydney and O'Neil, while giving the officer their gratitude for their deliverance, were hurt at his stern attitude toward Phil.

"Why did you allow him to escape?" Sydney asked as they were riding side by side along the back trail which the soldiers had taken the night before.

Phil looked at his friend, a hurt expression in his eyes.

"He was armed," Phil said quietly, a catch

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in his voice which he could not control, "and I knew he would not be taken alive. I couldn't kill him," he added, "before the girl's eyes, and there seemed no other way. Something tells me that there is a strong blood tie between those two. I can't explain, Syd," he cried in confusion. "It may sound sentimental, but the look in the girl's eyes when she realized what might happen made me lower the muzzle of the rifle to the ground."

Sydney was silent. He believed implicitly in Phil and if opportunity had offered he was sure that he would have acted the same.

"But why didn't you give Captain Blynn your reasons for allowing this insurgent to escape? You must see how he now views the occurrence and a word from you would have set matters straight."

A sudden anger came into Phil's face. "I would have told him all, but you saw how he cut off my explanation and arraigned me before that despicable spy Espinosa. After that a mule team couldn't drag the story from me. I'll tell it in good time, but not to Captain Blynn. Syd," he added confidingly, "I

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don't like that fellow Espinosa's looks. He reminds me of a domesticated coyote. He will bite the hands that feed him some day. You see if he doesn't!"

"I haven't any use for these men who are traitors to their own countrymen," O'Neil joined in as he rode up alongside of Phil, the trail having widened to allow three abreast. "The soldiers tell me he is the white-haired old boy with Captain Blynn. It was he that betrayed the Tagalos. How he gets his information no one seems to know. Did you notice," he asked suddenly, "the expression on his face when I dragged him away from the insurgent colonel? He wanted that man's life the worst kind, and the girl's too, I guess. We've made an enemy, Mr. Perry," the sailor added decidedly, "and one who won't soon forget us."

Phil gave a mirthless laugh.

"I don't mind making that sort of an enemy," he said, "but we shall have to keep our eyes open hereafter, I suppose, for Señor Espinosa."

It was broad daylight before the expedition arrived in Palilo and after a formal parting from the other Americans, which O'Neil described as "the frozen mit," the naval men

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separated from the soldiers and took the street leading to the water-front. There in front of the quartermaster's depot they saw the gunboat "Mindinao" moored snugly to the stone jetty.

A wave of pride swept through Phil's body as he took in the trim outlines of his command, one of which any lad would be proud to be captain.

A score of curious faces peered at them from the gunboat as they drew rein at the gangway and dismounted.

An exclamation of surprised inquiry met their ears from the quarter-deck of the vessel and a second later Ensign Marshall was wringing their hands warmly.

"Well, if this isn't luck," he cried. "I am partly packed and there's a steamer for Manila this afternoon. But," and he stopped, precipitously gazing with frank astonishment at their soiled and mud-stained uniforms, "where did you come from? I expected you by boat."

While the Chinese servants set before their hungry eyes a tempting breakfast, Phil and Sydney in turn gave Marshall the exciting incidents of their journey from Manila. O'Neil

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meanwhile had turned forward and was at once the centre of an admiring crowd of sailors; his big voice and hearty laugh sounded distinctly over the quiet water-front.

"If you aren't the luckiest lambs I've ever seen," Marshall laughed admiringly; "you're a regular lodestone, the three of you. Everything you touch turns to excitement. Now I've been here for three months, most of the time cooling my heels at the dock with no one to talk to except a lot of hayseed volunteers who haven't even been to sea, and now you come along and relieve me and I suppose, 'presto,' there'll be something doing at once."

"I hope not until we can get a little sleep," Phil exclaimed, smiling at Marshall's sincerity. "I am sleepy enough to drop off standing up."

"Well," Marshall said as he pushed back his chair and arose from the table, "I'll be finished packing in an hour, and then you can read your orders and take command. I don't want to miss that boat, for she makes easy connections with the transport for home. Think of it, Perry, home! Doesn't it sound fine?" Then, seeing that the name had not stirred his listeners to a great degree of enthu-

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siasm, he exclaimed, " Well, if you'd been living by yourself for nearly a year and hadn't seen anything but these natives, home would sound good to you, too."

The lads were soon asleep in steamer chairs under the quarter-deck awning, while Marshall busied himself with his packing. The Chinese servants moved about noiselessly and with deft hands quickly filled the two open trunks. Finally Marshall remade his toilet and appeared spick and span in a fresh and spotless white uniform.

Refreshed by even this short nap the midshipmen opened their trunks, which had been carried over nearly sixty miles of rough country on the shoulders of stalwart native carriers, and in an incredibly short time appeared on deck as fresh in appearance as if they had both stepped from the proverbial band-box.

A shrill whistle sounded on the gunboat followed by the call, " Lay aft, everybody."

The men filed aft on the miniature quarter-deck, lining themselves obediently on each side, and there waited.

A smile stole irrepressibly to Phil's face. Here on board this tiny ship, scarcely a hun-

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dred feet long and of a little over one hundred tons displacement, the far-reaching navy regulations were being carried out with as much form and punctiliousness as they would be on the biggest battle-ship.

In a graceful speech Marshall bade farewell to his small crew and then he unfolded the paper in his hand signed by no less a personage than the admiral commanding the Asiatic fleet.

"You are, upon the reporting of your relief, Midshipman Philip Perry, U. S. Navy, detached from the command of the U. S. S. 'Mindinao' and will proceed immediately to Manila, reporting your arrival, for passage to your home, to the senior officer present."

As soon as Marshall's voice died away, Phil began to read his own orders, which he had kept safely pinned to the inside of his breast-pocket during the last few exciting days.

"You are hereby detached from the U. S. S. 'Phœnix' and will proceed to Palilo, Island of Kapay, Philippine Islands, and upon your arrival assume command of the U. S. S. 'Mindinao' as the relief of Ensign Charles Marshall, U. S. Navy."

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For a moment there was complete silence, broken in an instant by a hoarse voice.

"Three cheers for Captain Marshall."

From twenty-five strong chests the cheers were given, while the happy man honored blushed with pleasurable pride and manly tears welled to his eyes. And then Phil's turn came to blush and look confused, and as he said afterward, foolish, when the same loud voice proposed, "Three cheers for Captain Perry."

Immediately the cheering was over the boatswain's mate's pipe sounded shrilly and the men, touching their caps respectfully, returned to their quarters forward.

The lads saw Marshall sail away on a small island steamer similar to the one on which they had commenced their journey four days before and then returned to sit upon the quarter-deck of their gunboat and enjoy the intense gratification of being their own masters on their own ship.

"Think of it, Syd. If I want to get under way all I have to do is to tell the machinist to get up steam and off we go. It's like having your own yacht," Phil exclaimed content-

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edly, leaning back luxuriantly in his chair and cocking his feet up comfortably on the rail. "Let me see," he added banteringly, "I am the captain; you are the executive officer, navigator, ordnance officer, all the watch officers and the chief engineer. Don't you feel heavy with all those titles?"

Sydney smiled happily. "Well, if the 'old man' doesn't expect too much of a poor midshipman, I'll do my best to uphold the dignity of them all," he replied.

After they had settled themselves in their new homes and had inspected every foot of the clean, trim little craft, admired the powerful battery of six long three-pounder guns, with auxiliaries of two one-pounders and a much sinned-against Colt gun, they started over the gangway bent upon paying their respects to the general commanding the troops in the military district of Kapay.

It was with a decided feeling of uneasiness that Phil sent his card by the orderly to the general. He knew that Captain Blynn had before this given his superior officer a full account of his expedition and he felt sure that the escape of Martinez with his consequent

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blame had not been forgotten in the telling. However, his high spirits could not be easily dampened by even these sinister thoughts. His greatest ambition had been achieved. Was he not the commander of an American man-of-war? He was not even under the command of that awe-inspiring figure he could see dimly at the desk, on whose shoulders the direction of an army rested.

In spite of this feeling of independence the lad's pulse beat faster as the orderly beckoned him to enter the general's office.

A short, sharp-featured officer, whose hair and beard were as white as his spotless clothes, arose from his chair and gave a welcoming hand to the visitors in turn, inviting them in silence to be seated.

Phil fidgeted restlessly in his chair, while the general paced slowly toward the open window and back again to his desk. Phil was on the point of speaking several times, but each time he waited, seeing in the army man's face that he was about to speak.

"Captain Blynn has made his report," came in metallic tones from the old campaigner, "and I am deeply distressed to hear that you,

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Captain Perry, deliberately allowed a prisoner to escape; one whom above all I wished to lay my hands on. Blynn is for asking the admiral to court-martial you at once; but I am sure you must have some good reason for your action."

He ended and glanced questioningly at the abashed Phil.

"My reason was," the lad blurted out, his feelings much hurt at the severe arraignment, "that in order to capture Colonel Martinez, I would have had to kill him in cold blood. I couldn't bring myself to do it for he had behaved handsomely toward us while we were his prisoners."

"But," the general retorted, "Señor Espinosa would have saved you the trouble if you had not interfered."

Phil's wrath blazed forth.

"How did I know that the man who was about to murder Martinez was a traitor to his own people? I saw the two natives on the ground, one with a knife upraised to bury it in the body of a man lying helplessly beneath him, and then when I had separated them with the help of a sailor, I saw that Martinez was armed, and I knew by a glance at his face

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that he could not be taken alive." The lad stopped suddenly, the girl's face coming suddenly before his eye. Did the general know of her? He remembered that her presence at the scene had not been mentioned. Had Espinosa failed to discover her presence? If not, why had he failed to mention her in his report to Captain Blynn?

General Wilson's parchment-like face betrayed a suspicion of a smile while he listened patiently to the midshipman's impetuous defense of his own actions.

"Captain Perry," he said slowly, "after you have been fighting these natives longer your sensibilities will become more blunted. The excuse of allowing an enemy to escape simply because you did not wish to kill him would be laughed at by those who have been through these six months of fighting. But," he added, "I respect the delicacy of the situation and shall tell Captain Blynn that I approve of your actions."

Phil's gratitude was fully expressed in the look he gave the officer as he murmured his thanks.

"I do not wish you to believe," the general

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added hastily, " that I approve of useless bloodshed, but in a warfare such as has been forced upon us the higher instincts of generosity to a fallen foe have but small place. It is an eye for an eye with us now."

As the general finished speaking the adjutant-general, Major Marble, entered and greeted the newcomers warmly. Both the lads had known him in their Annapolis days.

" Major Marble will give you the situation," the general said as the midshipmen shook his hand in parting. " I suppose you are ready to get under way on summons."

Phil answered promptly in the affirmative.

The major took the lads to his own comfortable quarters, facing the Plaza, and then told them briefly of the perplexing conditions under which the general was struggling.

" The insurgents will only fight," the major told them earnestly, " when they can surprise us, and with these untrained volunteers that has been very frequent of late."

The midshipmen told him how the American troops had marched unsuspectingly past Colonel Martinez's party the day before Captain Blynn attacked them.

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Major Marble shook his head sadly.

"Colonel Bane is not a soldier and never will be. He has blundered into more traps than any officer in the island."

A heavy footfall sounded on the stairs. Major Marble stopped talking suddenly, and walked quickly to the door as Captain Blynn's stalwart figure emerged from the stairway. "Come here, Blynn," he called.

The judge-advocate general approached; upon his face was a good-natured smile which changed suddenly to an ugly frown as he caught sight of his brother officer's guests. He would have turned sullenly away, but Major Marble put out a restraining hand. The lads had risen to their feet. Phil felt his own face suffuse with blood as he caught the glint of annoyance in Captain Blynn's eyes. The midshipman turned his back quietly and looked out the window. A moment later he heard the captain's heavy tread in the hall and a door slam loudly. When he turned Major Marble's face was pale and his blue eyes flashed angrily.

"Blynn's a boor, sometimes," he hastened to apologize. "I've heard the story. He's

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so absorbed in his work that any one who thwarts him arouses his dislike. He cannot see the human side. He's a veritable bull in a china shop. He and Espinosa are doing splendid service. All of our success so far has been through their secret service work. You'll be friends after you've been here a while. Martinez's escape hurts his pride just now. Martinez is something like the man with the iron mask. He comes from Luzon, but no one knows who he is. We have wired Manila and they answer that they know of no insurgent officer of that name. Yet he's here, and from all accounts has been expected. Most of his party were destroyed by Blynn, but about seventy-five are believed to have escaped, and Espinosa says that his followers are landing every day in the neighborhood of Dumaguete. I think the general's plan is to have you cruise off there in hopes of intercepting some of their war parties."

Phil had composed his ruffled feelings and listened eagerly while Major Marble was talking. His heart sank within him as there flashed through his mind thoughts as to whom Martinez might be. Maybe no less a

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personage than Aguinaldo himself, or General Rios, had been within his grasp. Small wonder that Captain Blynn was put out at his escape. Yet he could not have done otherwise with the girl's beseeching, pleading eyes upon him.

After leaving Major Marble's quarters the lads took a turn around the small Spanish town, loitering before the many shops and gazing admiringly up at the great churches, gray with age. They finally hired a carramata, the native cab, and drove through the city and out on the military road, begun by the Spaniards years before but, as was the custom of the country, never finished. As they drove into the Plaza on their return they came face to face with Señor Espinosa, riding a blooded horse which was prancing and pawing the earth, and making vain attempts to unseat its rider. Espinosa drew rein and bowed pointedly and courteously to the Americans.

"Señores," he called eagerly, "may I have a word with you?"

Phil ordered his cochero to stop, while Espinosa dismounted, throwing his reins to a

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small native gamin near by. The native advanced to the carriage hat in hand and with as much ceremony as if he were about to speak to some exalted personage.

"I am extremely mortified at my actions of yesterday," he exclaimed in his fluent and grandiloquent Spanish. "I have just seen the general. I abjectly apologize for my rudeness. May I count upon the friendship of the señores?" he asked in a suave, appealing voice.

Phil flinched unconsciously. He felt as if some reptile was drawing him toward him against his will. Espinosa's eyes were mild and his smile was urbane; yet he felt that treachery was hidden behind this mask of friendliness. Espinosa read the struggle in the lad's eyes and for an instant the mildness died in his own and a savage gleam took its place, but Phil's gaze had wandered, and this vision of the true man was lost.

"I don't bear you any ill will for that," Phil replied, his voice unconsciously accenting the last word. "I suppose you felt you had been cheated of your victory over Colonel Martinez." Then the lad stopped suddenly,

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a question trembling on his lips. Why should he not ask it? Wherein was the harm? "Who was the girl with him?" Phil suddenly questioned.

Espinosa's face paled and in his eyes fear crept. "The girl," he gasped, "was there a girl?"

Phil nodded. "Yes, and her small brother; they came on the steamer with us."

"And escaped with Martinez," Espinosa exclaimed excitedly. "I didn't see her; it was too dark. While I was struggling I thought I heard a woman's scream, but afterward I saw only Martinez."

Phil saw the native was unduly agitated. What did it mean? How and why had the presence of this woman so greatly excited him?

As the midshipmen drove toward their ship this question was still in Phil's thoughts.

"Is Espinosa playing a double game?" he asked Sydney suddenly. "Does he fear detection by his own people? Does he believe that Martinez did not recognize him and that his identity as a traitor is safe?"

Sydney shook his head over the mystery.

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CHAPTER VII

THE GUNBOAT COÖPERATES

As the two midshipmen stepped over the gangway of the "Mindinao" a figure arose from a seat on the quarter-deck and hurried eagerly toward them.

"I've been waiting an hour for you," Major Marble exclaimed excitedly. "The general wants you to start as soon as possible for Binalbagan. Baker's men have had a fight; we got some news, and then the wire was cut; our signal corps men have already gone out to find the break. Tillotson and fifty men will be on board inside of an hour."

The midshipmen's eyes opened wide with excitement.

"We're getting up steam, sir," O'Neil volunteered. "I thought something was in the wind when I seen the major come aboard, so I asked him and he told me what we was to do."

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"Good for you," Phil exclaimed, throwing an appreciative glance at the trusty boatswain's mate.

"Baker is in the field and a sergeant and twenty men are holding the post," Major Marble continued, "but if the natives are in great force such a handful cannot last long."

An hour later, Lieutenant Tillotson, a thin, blonde-haired youngster, marched his khaki-clad men on board and joined the little group of officers about the table on the quarter-deck.

Phil gave the young soldier a look of close scrutiny as he unbuckled the revolver from about his slim waist and laid it on the hatch top. There was nothing soldierly in the newcomer's appearance, and Phil unconsciously gave a sigh of disappointment. On the officer's collar between the crossed rifles was a single numeral.

"And a regular, too," he thought.

"Good luck," Major Marble cried as he passed over the gangway on to the dock while the gunboat heaved up its anchor from the muddy bottom of the river and steamed swiftly for the outer harbor.

Phil studied carefully the chart in his min-

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iature wheel house forward. "Ninety miles," he mused as he stepped off the distance to Binalbagan. "At this speed we'll be in by daylight."

The three sat long over their dinner on the cool quarter-deck, while the gunboat sped rapidly along the coast of Kapay. Forward, the soldiers and sailors fraternized, speculating upon the morrow's work.

The naval men's faces were keenly excited. The long-looked-for fun had commenced. They were almost willing to hope that Captain Baker's men were having a stiff time of it, so that the guns of their boat could have a chance to speak their disapproval to the insurgents. Lieutenant Tillotson sat coolly contemplating his coffee cup. To him these expeditions meant but one thing : discomfort.

"What's the chance for a fight?" Sydney asked the army man.

Tillotson shook his head. "None," he replied, "unless we can catch them by surprise. This gunboat would scare off an army of insurgents. They don't like them."

"But we shall surprise them," Phil cried enthusiastically. "We'll get there before day-

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light, hit the enemy from behind and crumple him up. I dare say, though, the fight will be finished before we arrive."

Tillotson shook his head. He was non-committal. "News travels fast in this country, and it's only twenty-five miles by road to Binalbagan," he said.

"Have you been there?" Phil asked, all interest.

"No," Tillotson replied carelessly.

"What is your plan?" Phil inquired quickly.

Tillotson eyed the lad, his blue eyes wide with astonishment, while a superior smile curved the corners of his mouth.

"Plan?" he asked. "Why, just to land, that's all; isn't that enough?"

"Yes, but," Phil urged, "it'll be dark, and if fighting is going on, we may get between the two fires. I got myself in that fix once, and I know how it feels."

Tillotson's eyes opened wider. He took a closer look at this young midshipman.

"What does he know of being under fire?" he thought. Tillotson was a first lieutenant; he had served in Cuba and in the Philippines,

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but his active duty until his assignment to the regiment whose number he now wore on his collar had been only at a desk at headquarters.

"What service have you seen?" he inquired of Phil in a patronizing voice. "Were you in the battle of Santiago, or Manila Bay, perhaps?"

"No—not those," Phil answered quickly, awe in his voice; "only a few skirmishes, that's all," he added sheepishly, "in South America and in China."

"Have we then had trouble in those places recently?" Tillotson inquired in mild surprise, and in a voice calculated to annoy his listeners.

"Not very lately," Phil answered; "the South American trouble was over a year ago and in China about six months ago. They were only small rumpuses. I dare say you didn't hear about them." Phil's pride was touched, for he knew that many papers had given full and even exaggerated accounts of both fights, and his name and Sydney's had been glowingly mentioned.

"I suppose I must have been out in the field

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at the time," Tillotson explained indifferently, "so I didn't see the papers."

"Hadn't we best make up a plan of just how we're going to do this thing?" Phil urged, returning to his point and being guided by his training at the Naval Academy, which had taught him to be methodical in all things.

Lieutenant Tillotson regarded the lad coldly. "You can plan for yourself," he replied. "I've been fighting these insurgents for some months and my men know my plans by heart: they comprise just one word: 'Forward.'"

After the lieutenant had gone to his cot and was sound asleep, the midshipmen adjourned to the brightly lighted chart house to discuss the situation.

"This rank business is what is hurting the army and navy too," Phil exclaimed testily. "Just because a man has one more stripe on his sleeve he thinks he knows more than every one below him, and considers a suggestion from a subordinate unpardonable insubordination, almost akin to mutiny. Well, Mr. Tillotson can keep his own plan, but, Syd, I am going to work out our end of it." While Phil spoke he drew the chart toward him and

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glanced carefully at the land in the neighborhood of Binalbagan.

"Do you see that marsh behind the town?" he exclaimed suddenly to Sydney whose eyes were upon the chart. "That's probably mangrove, and they can't get through that, so if they're attacking, it'll be from the side. If Tillotson lands his men to the northward and we take a position to the southward we ought to make a big haul. I told O'Neil to have the Colt gun ready and if it comes out as I hope it will, we'll land it there," pointing to a spot on the chart showing a low hill to the left of the town.

Sydney agreed heartily with Phil's plans, and berated soundly the attitude of the army man.

"I suppose," Phil said in apology for him as they parted, one to turn in, the other to keep watch until midnight, "that he's had so much fighting he's grown careless."

At midnight Phil was awakened, and relieved Sydney on the bridge, while the latter went below to get a few hours' sleep before he would be needed in the work to be accomplished. Phil gazed through the darkness

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ahead of the gunboat; the dim outline of the land along which they were traveling could be seen on the port hand. The coast was bald and he knew he could without danger run as close as he desired to its precipitous cliffs. The more he thought of the scornful carelessness of the young lieutenant the angrier he became. What right had he to consider such an expedition one to require no plans? What if he landed in an ambush?

"He should consider the lives of his men," he exclaimed hotly.

The midshipman already knew that a large part of the garrison were not at Binalbagan, having gone on an expedition to the north coast; a sergeant and twenty men had remained to guard the men's barracks and supplies, to say nothing of the natives who had professed friendship to the Americans and lived close under their protection. These poor souls, Phil knew, were between two fires; if the soldiers were defeated they would be killed by their enraged countrymen, while if their countrymen claimed and received aid from them they would at once be put in prison by the Americans, and yet if they refused to subscribe

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to the cruel demands of the insurgents their lives would pay for their rashness as soon as they wandered outside of their village.

He paced restlessly the silent bridge. His men he could see sleeping under the awning just below him. The man at the wheel, his eyes on the compass, and the lookout on the forecastle were alone awake and alert. The hours dragged by. A faint blush of dawn was visible on the eastern horizon when Phil through his powerful night-glass could recognize the chief landmark near the town of Binalbagan, a deep notch in the rugged coast hills through which the river in the season of rains flowed to the sea. It was as yet too dark to discover the town, and Phil knew that the hull of the gunboat could not be seen from shore until the sun had almost risen above the horizon. The last point of land was rounded, and the gunboat's bow was directed toward the locality where he knew the town was even then in the throes of an attack from a savage enemy. His heart rose in his throat as his mind dwelt upon the gruesome possibilities if the handful of soldiers had been overpowered by their numerous foe. It was

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almost with a sigh of relief that, as the gunboat approached nearer the shore, he indistinctly recognized the faint flashes of flame from rifle fire. At least the soldiers, or some of them, were still alive.

All hands had been called, and on the deck of the "Mindinao" there was a scene of great activity. Boats were cast loose and supplied with the accessories of war. A grim Colt gun was mounted on its tripod ready to be carried ashore to hurl its five hundred shots a minute at the foe.

Lieutenant Tillotson, after a rapid inspection of his men, approached the two midshipmen on the bridge. Phil had slowed the gunboat. With a leadsman in the chains, calling out the depth of water, he was now steering directly for the small, serpent-like flashes showing distinctly against the dark background of the hills.

"It looks like a big fight," Phil exclaimed excitedly as the lieutenant reached his side.

"These people make a lot of noise," the latter replied nervously. "I am not afraid of their rifles; the bolo is their weapon. By Jove!" he exclaimed, after taking another

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long look at the scene. "It is a big fight. I'd no idea they had so many rifles on the island. My fifty men won't be a drop in the bucket." He turned upon Phil, alarm in his eyes. "I shan't land under that fire. Our men are doubtless intrenched in the convent and can hold out till daylight, then when it gets light enough to see, you can easily drive the insurgents off with your guns."

Phil gazed at the army man in undisguised surprise. What did he mean? Was this the same Tillotson whose only order was "forward"? Here they were, undiscovered, with fifty soldiers, a Colt gun and a gunboat. It was a chance a landing party seldom had to deal its enemy a severe blow.

"There must be five hundred riflemen surrounding the town," Tillotson continued, with more assurance, believing from Phil's silence that he had agreed with his plan of attack. "It would be foolhardy to risk my men against such odds."

"He does think of his men, then," Phil thought contemptuously.

The gunboat had now stopped and lay motionless on the quiet sea. Without orders

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four boats fully manned with ready sailormen were noiselessly lowered from the davits. Stalwart arms lifted the Colt gun and placed it in the bow of a cutter. Phil gave a last careful search through his glass at the shore line, scarce a thousand yards away. He could see the shadowy form of the big white cathedral from which tongues of flame darted incessantly. To the right the long, low convent building was silent. The soldiers had seized the church and inside its shelter they were making their last stand. Phil was assured that they would be safe until their ammunition was exhausted, and his experience had taught him that soldiers in such straits, unless there was an officer to control them, would use up their last cartridge before thinking of the dire consequences. To husband ammunition was not their concern. Even as the lad gazed the enemy's flashes appeared closer to the cathedral. They were closing in; a final rush might land these savages under the very walls of the church. His hand shook violently and almost a sob escaped him as a bright flame suddenly appeared on the convent roof.

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"They have set the convent on fire," Phil exclaimed in an awed whisper. Then he turned fiercely on the army man.

"What are your plans now?" he asked almost roughly.

Lieutenant Tillotson drew himself up stiffly.

"At sunrise all will be clear," he angrily insisted. "It would be worse than murder to land now; as you said last night," he added, seemingly grasping at a straw, "we would be between two fires."

Phil gave him an impatient glance. "Come on, Syd!" he exclaimed eagerly, leading the way down from the bridge.

O'Neil had his four boats ready at the gangway; two for the soldiers and the others for the men of the gunboat who could be spared from the guns.

The lads gripped each other's hand in silence as Phil stepped on the gangway ladder leading to the boat. The soldiers by one accord had crowded aft, their rifles in hand and cartridge belts bulging with extra ammunition. Some had even filled the inside of their blue flannel shirt with more precious cartridges.

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"Aren't we going, sir?" the sergeant asked, gazing through the darkness for his lieutenant.

Phil shook his head. He was too angry to speak. Then suddenly without command the soldiers filed, at first hesitatingly, casting anxious glances behind them, into the awaiting boats.

"Syd," Phil said in a low, tense voice, "you know the plan. Keep those cordite shells away from our own men. Get as close in as you can; don't hesitate to run her ashore if necessary. If I am not mistaken we've got these natives in the closest box they've ever been in."

The four boats waited in silence at the gangway. Phil had taken his place with O'Neil in the boat carrying the Colt gun.

"Tell Lieutenant Tillotson we're ready," Phil said in his natural voice to Sydney on the gangway.

Lieutenant Tillotson strolled aft slowly, his eyes on the streak of dawn ever increasing in the eastern sky.

"Come on, Tillotson," Phil said harshly; "we've wasted too much time already."

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Lieutenant Tillotson stopped on the gangway and glared angrily at the composed midshipman below him.

"I'd like to know," he sneered, "what business a midshipman has to give orders to his superior officer."

"I'll give you one more chance, Tillotson," Phil said in a stern, tense whisper; he did not wish the men to hear. He could see even in the dim light the surprised, incredulous look on the faces of his sailors. "Will you please get aboard?"

The lieutenant remained motionless, a dark scowl on his face.

"Shove off," Phil ordered harshly.

The boats cleared the gangway. The sailors dipped their oar blades, ready to follow the leading boat in which was Phil and the trusty Colt.

"Come back here," the lieutenant cried, seeing he had gone too far. But Phil's jaw was set and he turned to him a deaf ear.

"It's his own fault," Phil confided to O'Neil at his side. "I didn't order his men in the boats; they got in without orders, as any decent men would do. What is it, O'Neil, just pure cold feet?" he asked suddenly.

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"Partly that, sir," O'Neil answered, "but Lieutenant Tillotson is not a coward; he's just overcautious and a bit of a braggart. He didn't like attacking in the dark."

The four boats pulled with oars muffled in toward the dim shore. Phil steered his boat for a point behind the long fringe of flashes, where the insurgent firing line was established, creeping ever closer to the handful entrenched behind walls that would soon be too hot to hold them. He had abandoned his first plan and now was landing all of his mixed command to the left of the town. If he could land without discovery, the first the enemy would know of his presence would be the horrifying, crackling report of the machine gun.

"There, steer for that," Phil breathed as a mound-like hill took shape out of the darkness.

With eyes straining and faculties alert for the first premonition of danger, Phil directed his boat forward. The gunboat had been swallowed up in the night astern. The shore grew more distinct. The church now stood out prominently, silhouetted against the back-

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ground of flames from the burning convent. Even as he gazed the gun fire from the church seemed to slacken and against the bright glow he could see indistinctly natives swarming toward the burning building. Their number seemed myriad; surely those could not be all riflemen. Then he turned cold as he suddenly grasped the sinister meaning—they were bolomen. For each rifleman, at least four natives armed with bolos are assigned. They are the guardians of the precious rifle. To obtain an insurgent gun, five men must be slain. These men, armed with weapons in the use of which every native is proficient, were advancing to rush upon the trapped men when the heat of the fire and the smoke had driven them from the shelter of the church's protecting walls.

So intent had Phil been that the boat, before he realized it, had grounded on the sandy beach and the men had jumped overboard into the shallow water. Once on the beach, he superintended the securing of the boats and then led the way toward the point he had selected for the first position to be occupied. The enemy were only a few hundred yards away, but so intent were they on the accom-

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plishment of their cruel purposes, that the shadowy forms of the men from the sea, stealing quietly through the short grass and against a background of darkness, were not discovered.

Phil's quick eyes suddenly discovered some one approaching from a direction away from the enemy. He gripped his revolver firmly, not knowing how many more men might be behind the figure discovered. As the Americans approached the newcomer, a native suddenly raised his hand and called loudly:

"Amigo, hua carta."[1]

A blow from O'Neil's revolver butt was the answer, while Phil grasped the letter which had been held in the stricken man's hand, placing it carefully in his breast pocket. Then a warning cry rang out, followed by a rifle-shot, the hot blast of which almost burned Phil's cheek, while a wiry form struck boldly right and left with his keen blade in the very midst of the startled Americans.

[1] "Friend, a letter."

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CHAPTER VIII

THE PRIVILEGES OF RANK

"THERE was two of 'em, captain," the infantry sergeant exclaimed, in that purely official calm voice for which the army non-commissioned officers are noted even under the most trying and hazardous circumstances, while he pushed away the body from beneath his feet, after making sure the native was not shamming. "They was messengers, telling the gugus of the coming of the gunboat, I reckon."

The small band of soldiers and sailors moved cautiously through the rank grass and sparse cocoanut palms. The enemy before the town had been too much occupied to discover the disturbance in their rear.

Phil saw that the fire had grown apace and now the conflagration threatened the entire town, but the greatest danger was to the church, for the dawn breeze was carrying the hot, stifling smoke and flame high on the

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church walls. It would be but a matter of minutes before the church itself would be on fire. The sun was slowly approaching the horizon; Phil saw the broad white band of light stretching across the eastern sky. Out on the water to the right of the town the lofty spars and smoke-stack of the "Mindinao" were indistinctly visible; Sydney was ready to begin his allotted work when the day had broken so that he could recognize friend from foe.

"If that fellow Tillotson hadn't funked," the midshipman whispered fiercely, his teeth set firmly, "and we could have had his men to the right of the town, we could have flayed 'em alive. Now they'll all escape past the gunboat—unless we let the gunboat open the ball and drive them all this way.—I'll do it," he cried determinedly.

They had now reached the grassy-topped mound, the Colt gun placed in battery, and the first string of cartridges fed into its steel maw.

"Sergeant," Phil commanded tersely, "deploy your men to the right and left, and take shelter. Don't fire without orders."

The sergeant saluted and gave a quick,

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sharp command. The soldiers melted from sight. This was a new experience for them. Six months in the islands and the only real fights they had seen were included in a few shots at the disappearing brown men after they had fired their volley from ambush, killing and wounding several of their comrades. Now here were over five hundred yelling natives worked up to the wildest pitch of savage triumph before their eyes, within range of their trusty guns, and as yet no orders to fire.

"Stop your grumbling," O'Neil overheard the sergeant tell one of his soldiers in language more forceful than polite. "This is something that your thick skulls can't savvy. It's naval strategy. Wait till the ball opens and every mother's son of you can prove his claim to a sharpshooter's medal."

When all was ready, Phil could only wait patiently for the sun to give Sydney enough light for his gunners to see to shoot, but meanwhile he saw with ever-increasing impatience that the enemy was gradually closing in about the church and convent. If the dawn were too long coming! If the terrible, irresistible rush came before Sydney had opened fire, then

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their attack would have failed, for the loss of twenty American soldiers could not be repaid by the death or capture of the whole insurgent army. It seemed to the awaiting midshipman that hours must have passed since his men had entrenched themselves on this small hillock. Surely the sun had stopped in its movement around the earth! The flames in the town became higher and the smoke arose in greater volume while the crackling of burning bamboo added its sinister sound to the discharges of the rifles, ever drawing nearer the besieged garrison. With heart beating rapidly and youthful indecision stamped on his face, he gazed anxiously at the "Mindinao." He breathed a sigh of partial relief as he saw she was close inshore and was clearly visible. Surely it was light enough to see, or if not yet the enemy must soon discover the presence of the unwelcome and much-feared visitor. When they fled, their retreat would be toward where he and his machine-gun and sixty-five American rifles were awaiting them.

Moisture stood out on the youngster's forehead in great beads and his tongue lay like cotton against the roof of his mouth.

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"I couldn't have stood it another second," he breathed, as a jet of flame shot out from the gunboat's bow and a sharp report followed by thunderous reverberations awakened for the first time an unknown terror in the hearts of the savage attackers, and brought courage and joy to the hopeless men inside the stifling walls of the church.

The little gunboat belched flame from her three-pounders and the eager and delighted watchers on the mound of earth, clustered about the Colt gun, gazed with admiration and awe as the high explosive shells tore great gaps in the earth, scattering the demoralized natives in all directions. The avenue of escape to the right was closed; the enemy dared not approach nearer that death-dealing war-ship, and with one accord, an uncontrolled, terrified mob of human beings, without method or leaders, they turned and retreated directly toward the mound on which Phil and his men were impatiently awaiting them.

O'Neil had taken his place at the Colt gun. Seated in the bicycle saddle, he squinted carefully down the massive rifle barrel, while the seething mass of brown came ever closer.

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When the insurgents had arrived at a distance of two hundred yards, Phil gave the order "Open fire," in a voice scarcely recognizable as his own, it trembled so with excitement.

Bang—bang—bang, faster than one could count, resembling the explosions in the cylinders of a high power touring car, only infinitely louder and more sonorous, the Colt gun hurled a solid leaden stream of bullets into the charging mass.

As coolly as if he were merely steering a boat, O'Neil played the leaden hose on the startled enemy. They went down like chaff before the reaper; while from behind urging them onward, the cordite shells of the gunboat, which had followed them, burst with terrific havoc.

Throwing down their rifles—it did not enter their heads to ask for the quarter which the Americans would have been only too willing to give—they turned inland directly toward the burning town.

"Cease firing," Phil cried out in alarm, as he saw suddenly appear, almost in the path of the routed natives, the small band of men

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who had come so near death at their hands. Rifles in hand, the relieved soldiers advanced toward the now terrified insurgents and poured a deadly fire into their already mortally stricken ranks.

"Come on," yelled Phil, leading the way on a run, followed by his men. "We can bag them all in that swamp." But the lad did not realize what fear can do for a native Filipino. The Colt gun on the left where O'Neil had advanced it on the run, and the rifles of the threescore jubilant soldiers lent wings to their enemy's feet as those finding themselves miraculously spared from instant death plunged into that impenetrable mangrove thicket. Volley after volley was fired in the direction in which they had disappeared, and the crash of the bullets could be distinctly heard, but no white man could have followed where they fled.

The sun was now above the horizon and the light of day showed a gruesome sight to Phil's eyes. Many hundreds of natives lay dead or in their death agonies on the sandy soil. The doctor from the garrison and his assistants attempted to help the sufferers, but after one

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hospital man had been maimed for life by a wounded native to whom he was administering, there could be little more to do. Graves were at once dug in the little cemetery back of the church and there they were placed one on top of the other in long rows and then the earth was thrown on top and covered with rock to keep out the hungry mongrel dogs, more savage even than their masters.

The fight had hardly terminated before a small boat came quickly ashore from the gunboat. Phil's good spirits left him as he saw Lieutenant Tillotson come swaggering up to the group of soldiers and sailors. Sergeant Sweeney, who had been in command of the small garrison, had been excitedly giving Phil the details of the attack, when the lieutenant's flushed, angry face brought him to a sudden stop.

"Well, sergeant," he cried in an insolent harsh voice, "make your report to me; I am in command here; this man has no standing."

Phil was so stunned at the words that he didn't understand or at least realize its meaning.

Then his righteous anger and loathing welled into his throat.

"How dare you talk of me that way before

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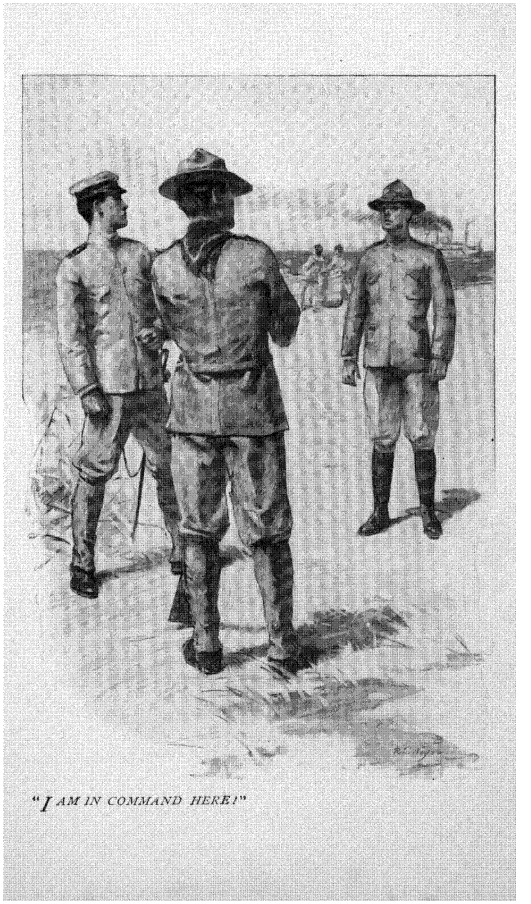

"I AM IN COMMAND HERE!"

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your men?" he cried, his face pale as death, and his strong fists clinched.

"Well, who are you, anyway?" Tillotson exclaimed swaggeringly. "A midshipman! —ashore you have no status, so from now on please mind your own business."

"Come on, sir," O'Neil whispered, grasping firmly but respectfully Phil's arm. The sailor felt the lad's muscles standing out like whip-cords. He foresaw that something was about to happen. "Don't spoil all our fun, sir. If you hit him, which he richly deserves, you'll lose your ship, and where will Mr. Monroe and Jack O'Neil be then?"

In spite of his anger and mortification the remark of his favorite brought a faint smile to Phil's face.

"I guess you're right, Jack," he replied, his voice shaking with emotion, calling him unconsciously by the name which he always used in his thoughts, and allowed himself to be led away.

The midshipman called his men together and walked quietly toward the beach, while Lieutenant Tillotson took entire charge of gathering up the spoils.

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"The lieutenant's compliments, sir," spoke an orderly at Phil's side as he was about to step into his boat to go to the "Mindinao," where at least he did have some status. "And he says, he orders you to send your men to report to him to put things in order."

Phil turned on the messenger fiercely, and then in time remembered the soldier was but the innocent bearer of this insolent command.

"Come on, O'Neil," the lad said with a tone of humiliation in his voice, leading the way back toward the burning town. "I suppose I must pocket my pride. I am only a midshipman, after all, and on shore here I am under his orders."

After Sydney had anchored the gunboat he hailed a boat from the shore and soon stood by Phil's side. The fire was quite beyond their control and inside of a few hours a great part of the nipa town was in ashes. By almost superhuman efforts most of the supplies and ammunition of the garrison were rescued, and piled in the little plaza in front of the church, where tents were pitched and all preparations made to receive the soldiers of Captain Baker when they returned from their

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expedition to the northward. In interrupted and fragmentary sentences Phil told Sydney of the insults offered him by the army man. Sydney's eyes blazed in anger.

"The dastardly coward," he exclaimed after the story had been unfurled before him. "While you were risking your life, he was sitting on the quarter-deck apparently glad to be in a place of safety, and now he comes and wants to reap all the reward. I don't see how he has the face to appear before his men."

"He's not a regular, anyway," Phil exclaimed in a relieved voice. "O'Neil says the sergeant told him he was some rich politician's son, a black sheep, appointed in a regular regiment. That explains him somewhat."

"He's a yellow dog, that's what he is," Sydney exploded, "and I'd like to tell him so to his face, and I will, the first chance I get."

"No, you won't, Syd," Phil said firmly; "remember ashore here we're under his orders. Don't give him an opportunity to make it unpleasant. It's bad enough as it stands.

"There's where we can be of service," he suddenly exclaimed as his eye followed the

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trailing end of a wire. "The telegraph instruments were saved and are over there in the grass; we'll connect up and see if we can get Palilo."

After a half hour's work with the help of the single signal corps man, the instrument had been remounted inside of a tent and the lads watched eagerly as the operator endeavored to call up headquarters. The instrument clicked rhythmically for a fraction of a minute and as it ceased the receiving relay clicked loudly in return.

"The line's O. K., sir," the soldier said as his hand rested on the sending key, and he looked up for orders. "Shall I tell Palilo that we're all right?"

Phil was about to answer when he suddenly remembered the stinging words of the lieutenant. Pocketing his pride once more he shook his head. "Report to the lieutenant that the line is through," he said as the two lads turned away.

A few moments afterward, while they stood outside the tent they heard the clicks of the sending key. Each listened intently; not with any idea of eavesdropping but because

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on board ship it had been a custom formed in their Annapolis days to read all signals. In this way they both had perfected themselves in all forms of signaling and could read in all codes.

"*To Adjutant-General, Palilo:*

"I attacked insurgents besieging garrison at daylight. Placing the gunboat on one flank, I sent guard with Colt gun on the other. Attack was a perfect success. We have captured nearly two hundred rifles. We have no casualties. Baker still away.

"TILLOTSON."

The midshipmen read the message, their eyes opening wide with wonder as the busy little instrument proceeded.

"Well, of all the nerve!" Phil exclaimed as the signature was reached. "I attacked, I placed the gunboat, I sent guard. But where was he?—he doesn't say, does he!"

At noontime the midshipmen found themselves unwilling guests at Lieutenant Tillotson's table for the midday meal. Phil had asked permission to withdraw his men on

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board ship but the lieutenant had curtly refused.

Napkins were a luxury not supplied, and after finishing his dinner, consisting of wholesome army rations, Phil drew out of his pocket his handkerchief to use in place of the missing square of linen. The letter taken from the dead native fell at his feet. The excitement and worry of the last few hours had driven the knowledge of its presence from his mind.

Tillotson's keen eye was upon the letter and he stretched out his hand for it in stony silence. Phil gave it up instantly. The lieutenant broke the seal and ran his eyes quickly over its contents. His face showed keen interest as he read; then he put the letter carefully into his own pocket. The midshipmen regarded him with interest, half expecting to hear the purport of its contents; but were disappointed, for in a few minutes he arose and left them without a word.

"The rest of the garrison are returning, captain," O'Neil announced, joining the midshipmen after his dinner with the soldiers. "You can see their dust down the beach."

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The lads watched with ill-concealed delight, much to Tillotson's discomfiture, the arrival of Captain Baker and his eighty dust-covered soldiers. As they swung into the Plaza, apparently for the first time, they realized that something extraordinary had happened, for they quickened their pace and Captain Baker, unable to control his anxiety further, shouted eagerly to ask what had happened.

Tillotson, assurance in his every motion, walked out to meet him.

Phil could not refrain from comparing these two figures—one that of Captain Baker, alert, muscular, tanned by the sun, his uniform dirty and stained by travel, with grime on his soldierly countenance, while the other, slender, his clothes neat and of a dandified cut, seemed more in place in a drawing-room than in the jungles of the Philippines.

"I saw the gunboat when we struck the beach below there," Captain Baker exclaimed, his anxiety relieved after Tillotson had assured him all was safe, and he advanced hand outstretched, a hearty smile of greeting on his strong face. "Is this the new captain

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of the 'Mindinao'? I am glad to meet you both," he said as he shook the hands of the midshipmen in turn. "I suppose we are once more indebted to the navy."

Tillotson frowned. "I have fifty men with me," he exclaimed protestingly. "Of course the gunboat was useful in bringing us here and shelling the beach."

"What's become of all the town natives?" Captain Baker asked suddenly.

"They all left town yesterday morning," the sergeant replied. "That's how we knew that all was not going just right."

"The cowardly beggars!" Captain Baker exclaimed. "You'd have thought we were their best friends. Well, I suppose they've got to look out for themselves. Have you buried all the bodies?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, sir," Tillotson replied, "but your sergeant has the names of all those he recognized; apparently there were some of the town people in the attack."

Captain Baker nodded his head, a sorrowful expression on his face. "Who can we trust among these people?" he said in a low voice as he scanned the list handed him. "Even

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my own servant against us. Pedro might have stuck a knife in me any night he wished."

"A telegram, sir," the captain's orderly announced handing him a sheet of paper.

"Send gunboat 'Palilo.' If desirable retain Tillotson and men."

Captain Baker read the message aloud, then his soldier eye gazed intently at the lieutenant. The inspection from the expression on the captain's face had not been reassuring; however, in a second he turned a smiling face to Phil.

"Captain Perry, I am sorry I am not to have the pleasure longer; however, I am deeply grateful to you and the navy for saving my men. Tillotson, you can return; I'll keep your men."

Lieutenant Tillotson's face, which had become sorely troubled as the telegram had been read, suddenly cleared. Phil felt that he would have died if a soldier of Captain Baker's standing and reputation had even hinted at his uselessness, as he had at this hard-skinned, self-satisfied lieutenant.

After a night's run the "Mindinao" was

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again tied up to the dock at Palilo. On the trip down the lads had left their unpleasant passenger severely alone, while he had spent his evening writing, filling sheet after sheet of paper with closely spaced lines.

"Official report of a spectator," Sydney whispered loud enough purposely for Tillotson to hear. The latter looked up and scowled.

After breakfast the next morning Phil reported at the general's office. Major Marble received him with a grave face.

"For the land's sake, Perry! What have you done to Tillotson? He denounces you in scathing terms in his official report to the general; accuses you of weakening his authority before his men; humiliating him on your own ship; deliberately shoving off from the ship without him because he did not approve of the entire plan which you devised without his concurrence, and lastly reports you for insubordination when under his orders ashore and treating your superior officer with contempt. In fact," Major Marble ended, "he has started at the top and gone to the bottom of all the military offenses."

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Phil gasped in astonishment. Major Marble stood gazing compassionately at his young friend, apparently hoping to hear him clear up the mystery. But Phil was silent. He must have time to think.

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CHAPTER IX

THE KATIPUNAN SOCIETY

After Phil had reached his ship he scarcely remembered how he had behaved to his anxious and sympathetic friend, Major Marble. The boy's mind was dazed. He had not believed that Tillotson would dare make charges against him, but now that they had been made, how should he act? The mere words of each charge were only too true but Phil felt that he had had strong and sufficient reasons for acting as he did. But now he must refute these charges or else go before a court martial. But how could he refute them? There was but one way and that was to go to General Wilson and tell his story, which would be corroborated by Sydney. It would be tantamount to telling the general that one of his officers was an arrant coward and unfit to be trusted with hazardous expeditions. And even then the charges would still hold. They were true in substance,

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every one of them. As commanding officer of a gunboat Phil was within his rights when he laid his plans as to where the attack of the gunboat should be and the locality to land his own men; but he could only advise the army man from his nautical experience as to where the best place would be to land the soldiers in order that their coöperation might be harmonious. Lieutenant Tillotson was free to accept his suggestions or refuse them as he saw fit. So long as they were both afloat the army officer could give no orders to him, nor could Phil give orders to his superior in rank. To the anxious lad it was certainly a perplexing situation. His conscience was quite clear upon the soundness of the plan he had proposed, and he felt that in carrying it out they had struck a severe blow at the insurrection and had saved the beleaguered garrison. The lieutenant's action might in feeble minds be excused through the plea of caution, but no strong man would hesitate to say that it was a case where caution should not have been considered.

Sydney was beside himself with indignation when he learned of the spiteful charges of the

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lieutenant and was for seeking him out and bestowing personal vengeance, but Phil dissuaded him from any such rash act.

"I should have ordered his men out of the boats," Phil said bitterly, "when I saw Tillotson was not coming. We might have won without them, although they were a great comfort, and if the Colt gun had gone back on us they would have been a necessity."

"What will you do?" Sydney asked, exasperated at the apparent indecision of his friend. "Tell the straight story to the general and he'll make it hot for that dandified gentleman soldier."

"The worst of it is," Phil replied gravely, "Tillotson is the son of an influential man in the Philippine government, and if he takes our part the general will incur the father's displeasure, for a father will never believe wrong of a son. A general has been suspended for less, and that would ruin his army career. I think our best plan is to try to compromise with Tillotson, and if he won't listen to reason then ask the general to send us to another part of the island."

Major Marble, as much as he disliked the

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task, was in duty bound to hand this report to the general through his judge-advocate general. Captain Blynn believed he was a fair man and was proud of his reputation of being scrupulously honest, yet when he read this arraignment of the young midshipman, a smile, almost of pleasure, passed over his face. Here was a case in which he took the greatest delight. The captain instinctively disliked Tillotson. He saw that he did not have the making of a soldier, and this expedition had been one of the few with which he had been entrusted. On another occasion his command had suffered severely from an ambush of bolo-men, and there had been vague rumors that Tillotson had not behaved as it was traditional a ——th Infantry officer should, but there had been nothing official, thanks doubtless to his father's influence. As Captain Blynn read he recognized the work of a law graduate. Each charge was described at length in an enclosed letter. Undoubtedly the circumstances were true.

"Queer youngster, that fellow Perry," Captain Blynn exclaimed almost in admiration as he finished and folded the communication

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preparatory to laying it before his chief. "He's got grit, but I fear bad judgment. I could never see why he allowed that Martinez to escape. Espinosa says it was deliberate. Well, he must pay for his ill-judged acts. I don't want any one about here who's going to have qualms of conscience about killing a Filipino who won't surrender. He handled that attack at Binalbagan splendidly, though," he thought. "But I am afraid we've got to make an example of him."

As Captain Blynn approached the general's office, he caught the sound of voices from within, and soon saw that the midshipman himself was talking earnestly with the general. Captain Blynn was not deterred; with him business was business and here was the officer charged with a grave offense.

"I have a letter here, sir," he said in his cold, official voice addressing his chief, "written by Lieutenant Tillotson, making very serious charges of misconduct against Midshipman Perry."

"Captain Perry has just told me that he had heard of these charges," the general replied in an annoyed voice. "It seems to me,

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Perry, you have stirred up quite a hornet's nest in the few days you have been in Kapay."

Phil blushed furiously, and his eyes flared forth his indignation at such an unfair remark. Especially as he could make no answer to an officer of such rank.

The general adjusted his glasses and read from beginning to end the report placed on his desk by the captain; then he glanced up, a puzzled look on his deeply lined face.

"This is a very ugly business," he said sharply. "We have no time to investigate such matters. We are busy putting down this rebellion. Yet such conduct as charged in this report, Mr. Perry, cannot go unheeded. There's but one thing to do," he continued after a moment's thought. "Wire to the admiral at Manila and request your detachment for private reasons."

"That would be a tacit acknowledgment that I am in the wrong," Phil cried out, his voice trembling with anger at the injustice in the general's words.

"Read this letter," the general said brusquely, "and if you can clear yourself do so before Captain Blynn and myself."

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Phil took the letter and read page after page of incriminating evidence against him. It told of the disagreement as to the plan of landing and the time of landing. Then of the departure of the expedition from the gunboat, when the accuser claimed that Phil had deliberately shoved off without him, "doubtlessly jealous of being outranked," the report read. Then of his insubordination ashore after the attack when he, Tillotson, had taken charge of the work of clearing up the battlefield. Of the withdrawal of the sailors and their refusal to help until an imperative order had been sent the midshipman not to go to the gunboat, but to return and give aid to the soldiers.

Phil's heart thumped as he read. The report was untrue in so far as the imputations on his reasons were concerned, but the incidents were only too true, and except by bringing a charge of cowardice and calling soldiers and sailors to corroborate him, he could not deny the report. Tillotson's report stated further that both midshipmen had during the return trip acted toward him in a manner which lessened the respect of the sailors for him. That

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one of them had made remarks derogatory to his character as a soldier.

Phil handed the report back, his eyes swimming. His anger was rife within him and he dared not speak.

"This is a case for a Court of Inquiry," Captain Blynn said to the general, "but I cannot see how an army court can decide on the case of a naval officer. Mr. Perry apparently cannot deny these charges, so if he is disinclined to wire the admiral, I suggest that you send a message asking to have him relieved."

The general nodded his head in the affirmative and Captain Blynn withdrew to prepare the fatal telegram.

"I am sorry, Mr. Perry," the general said, his face softening. "I have heard of your fight, and it was a masterpiece. I believe you have the stuff in you; but insubordination cannot be condoned. You must learn to obey and be respectful to officers higher in rank."

"Why couldn't he tell the general just how everything had happened?" he thought as he listened to the kindly voice, "not to ask that he might retain his ship but simply to clear his name of this cloud."

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Captain Blynn appeared, telegram in hand, which he laid before the general for his signature.

"Before I send this," the latter said turning to Phil, "see Lieutenant Tillotson yourself, and if he is willing to withdraw this report I shall forget the incident."

Phil left the office, knowing that it was but a respite. He had passed Tillotson on the street when on the way to the general's office and had saluted and spoken, but his greeting had been ignored.

It was dark when Phil left the headquarters building and walked toward the docks. As he passed slowly through a narrow street, the forbidding windowless walls towering over him with here and there a dark alleyway, where an assassin might lurk, he instinctively felt for the handle of his navy revolver lying in its holster slung to his left hip. At the end of the street near the river and but a few paces from the gunboat he saw a calesa drawn up, its curtains drawn closely, just beyond the glare of a street lamp, and he was surprised to see a hand wave to him from the gloom inside.

Stepping cautiously to the side of the await-

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ing vehicle, he heard his name called in a familiar woman's voice. It was the unknown girl of the "Negros."

"Señor Perry, may I speak to you?" she inquired excitedly in Spanish.

Phil took her outstretched hand eagerly, forgetting for the moment his own trouble.

"What is it, señorita?" he asked eagerly.

"Come to-night to the northeast corner of the Plaza, at nine o'clock; bring some of your men with you. Maria Rodriguez will show her gratitude to the brave American officers." He would have detained her, to learn more, but her sharp command to the alert driver had come before he could recover from the startling summons and the next moment the calesa was racing madly up the street.

Full of his news, he boarded the gunboat and confided to Sydney the girl's message.

"Maria Rodriguez," Sydney exclaimed. "She's the daughter of Juan Rodriguez, the wealthiest Filipino in Kapay. I wonder what's up? Her father, you know, refuses to join the insurgents, and yet will not aid the Americans, and the general will not molest

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him. He lives on his estates just beyond the city on the river."

O'Neil was summoned and told to make up a party of five good men to accompany them and then the midshipmen sat down to dinner; but neither had an appetite for food.

Phil told Sydney of the outcome of his visit to the general and the latter was cast down with gloom.

"I shan't stay without you," he asserted. "Can't something be done? Is there no way to make this man Tillotson back down?"

Phil shook his head. "I shan't try. I'll just take my medicine. It's bitter, but every one who was there knows that he was in the wrong."

Nine o'clock saw the small party at the northeast corner of the Plaza. The city seemed deserted. There was no one on the streets. Suddenly the clanking of a sword was heard and the sailors slunk quietly out of sight into the shadow of a near-by doorway.

"It's Lieutenant Tillotson," Phil whispered, "inspecting sentries; he's officer of the guard to-night."

After the officer had passed, the party waited

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anxiously for several minutes and then a native appeared walking slowly toward them from a cross street. He stopped fifty yards away and beckoned; then turned quickly and walked away.

Phil and Sydney leading, they followed the vanishing figure ahead of them. He guided them through street after street, leading farther and farther away from the occupied part of the city. Suddenly the native stopped, beckoned with his hand, and entered a doorway of a pretentious Filipino dwelling.

"Your men must wait here, señor; it is the señorita's order," the native told the lads. "The officers are to come with me." He raised his finger to his lips to caution silence. "If we are discovered it will mean death, señor."

"What's the game, sir?" O'Neil asked eagerly, not having heard the whispered words of the native.

"You're to stay here out of sight," Phil explained quietly. "If we need help I'll fire my revolver."

With a parting caution the midshipmen stealthily followed their guide up the street,

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hugging the dark shadow of the houses, and entered the wide archway of a large native building. Inside was total darkness, and it needed all their confidence in the girl who had invited them to come to still their awakening suspicions.

The guide gave a low whistle and the slight sound caused their hearts to beat faster amid the profound silence within.

"Señores, you have come," a woman's musical voice dispelled their fears. "Please step this way; I am sorry there can be no light."

Phil quietly led the way in the direction of the voice, and his eyes soon discerned the figure of the girl, a darker object among the surrounding gloom. He felt a warm, confiding hand in his, and allowed himself to be led deeper into the blackness of the building.

The midshipmen followed blindly; their eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, could see nothing. They knew from an occasional contact with a wall that they were in a narrow passage and from the damp odor they knew it must be some depth below the ground. Several times their heavily shod feet slipped on the muddy floor, and occasionally they could

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hear the tinkly drip of water. The passage-way led gradually downward, the dampness increasing.

Finally the girl stopped and the sound of the heavy breathing of the four people filled the narrow limits of their surroundings.

"These are underground passages, built years ago during a threatened uprising of the natives against the Spaniards," Señorita Rodriguez whispered. "This passage leads to the secret chamber of the 'Sociedad de Katipunan.' To be present at a meeting the penalty for a non-member is to take the oath or suffer death. Only the direst necessity has brought me here to-night. I have no right to ask you, señores," she said pleadingly, "to take this great risk for my sake, and if you so decide we can now turn back. Lopez, my father's trusted patron, will go with me."

"We will go with you, señorita," Phil answered without a second's hesitation. "What are we to see?" he asked, unable to control his curiosity at the mystery of it all.

"Come, you shall discover for yourself," she said as she moved forward, her hand still in Phil's, while Sydney held his companion by

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the coat sleeve and Lopez, as noiseless as an Apache, brought up the rear. "The meeting will not take place for some time, and meanwhile we shall have time to talk."

Silently they moved forward until presently, from the sound of their footfalls, Phil knew that the walls had receded and that they had entered a large chamber.

"The stairs, señor," Maria whispered, and the lads found themselves mounting earthen steps. Again their feet struck wooden boards and they knew that they had ascended from the passage and were in a large room directly over the one which they had just left.

"This is the old Spanish inquisition room," the girl said in a low voice, "and a fitting meeting-place for the Katipunan murderers. But come, they may be here any moment."

Phil admired the daring of this frail girl. She had led them into the very nest of these traitorous outlaws, for it now dawned upon him what was the true meaning of these meetings.

"Do they enter the same way as we have come?" he asked anxiously, casting an apprehensive glance behind him.

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"No," Maria answered, a smile on her face as she felt the lad's hand tremble imperceptibly on her own. "We are not in the room; it is beyond us, as you shall see soon. We are in a covered gallery which is secret and known to but few even of the society. The passage through which we came has not been used for years, and until last night was closed with earth. Lopez has spent all day with some of his most trusty men clearing it in order that we might pass."

Phil cautiously peered about him, but his eyes could not penetrate the darkness. He knew that his feet were on boards, and that his hand rested upon a wall which was rough and dry. Then suddenly as if by a flash of lightning a vivid picture of his surroundings was shown him.

"They are coming," Maria whispered in a startled voice. "Lie down and for your life do not speak." The next second all was again blackness. The lads and their companions had noiselessly thrown themselves down on the floor and were holding their breath in an agony of suspense. The cool handle of Phil's revolver, which he had unconsciously drawn

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from its holster, brought back his confidence. At least they would not die without some injury to their enemy.

Again came the flash of light; it flickered and seemed on the point of extinction, and then continued dimly. Phil recognized that this time the match had not gone out in the room over which their gallery looked, and that a candle was dimly burning. Then another and another candle was lighted and little by little the great room was exposed to their view.

Figures of men could be seen clustered about a table in the far end of the hall, some seated in chairs, but most of them on the ground in native fashion, while beyond the table was a niche in which an image glittered. The midshipmen soon discovered that it was an exaggerated emblem of the Katipunan society which they had seen on insurgent flags; the sun within a flaming triangle, all of pure silver.

A noise of feet and guarded voices came to their ears as the room slowly filled with men. As the light from the many candles shone upon their faces the anxious watchers saw that each man was masked.

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After an interminable interval of time all was hushed and a man arose from a seat near the symbol of the society and beckoned one of the others to approach.

Phil felt the girl beside him tremble violently, and give a sharp gasp of pain.

"Garcia," she breathed, "my father's trusted friend."

"Our unknown brother," the leader said in Spanish, which Phil was to learn was the accepted language of the society, "has been summoned to join our society; his name is recorded secretly in the recording book; his number is one thousand and ten." The leader then drew from his scabbard a sharp glistening bolo and circled it with the adroitness of a juggler about the head of the newly enrolled member. Gradually one after another of the masked natives arose, their keen-bladed bolos held aloft, while in single file they moved slowly with a rythmical dancing step toward the silent "one thousand and ten." As they advanced a weird chant broke from twoscore throats. It was not loud, but the volume filled the high vaulted chamber and lent an uncanny air to the mysterious initi-

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ation. It seemed to Phil as he watched, his eyes fairly bulging from their sockets, that the unfortunate man would surely be severed into a thousand pieces by these fierce, savage fanatics, but he stood silent, his arms folded across his breast, while his eyes gleamed in exultant excitement.

Slowly the members danced by their new comrade and returned to their seats.

Then the new member, by sign from the leader, advanced and prostrated himself before the emblem.

"The sign of giving his life to the cause," Maria whispered. Then she stiffened and a stifled sob broke from between her clenched lips as the voice of the speaker filled the room.

"Rodriguez has refused the summons. He is no longer our friend. He has gone over to the despised Americans. Through him our men were attacked and killed at Banate, and also at Binalbagan. He holds his servants from joining our cause only through fear. Once he is removed they will all join us."

"It is all untrue!" Maria's voice, clear, low, and distinct, sounded through the room, and at

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once the assemblage was on its feet, gazing distrustfully at each other. Phil's hand had grasped the girl's arm with a grip of steel, fearing that in her indignation and anger she would expose herself to the view of these two-score traitors.

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CHAPTER X

IN THE SHADOW OF A SUSPICION

PHIL's heart beat tumultuously as he laid a restraining hand on Maria's arm to prevent her from rising up from the floor of the gallery. The instant the girl's indignant, vibrating voice was heard an uncanny silence fell upon the masked men. Each looked fearfully at the other. Every man mistrusted his neighbor. The girl's heavy breathing sounded ominously loud in the lad's ears, and he was dumb with apprehension that she would sacrifice them all by a second outburst of passionate denial. They dared not move. There was naught to do but wait. If the society determined upon a search then their one chance was to make a dash for the passageway, and hold the angry men at bay with their revolvers. O'Neil and his five men were near the entrance, and Phil felt sure that their cause was not altogether desperate.

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After an interval that seemed hours the leader's voice broke the heavy silence.

"Who dared deny that Rodriguez has betrayed his people?" he cried.

Phil's strong fingers pressed firmly the girl's arm and his eyes begged obedience.

The masked men sat as if turned to stone. No sound broke the stillness.

A loud knock on the door behind the speaker brought the assemblage to their feet in sudden fear. Phil saw that many had drawn their bolos, while others stood ready to extinguish the long rows of candles.

A challenge was called and answered, and the next second the door was opened from within and a native entered. Phil beheld in admiration the air of grace and fearlessness while he advanced boldly toward the startled leader.

A smothered exclamation from Maria caused the lad's eyes to travel quickly to her face. She was staring, a horrible dread stamped on her face, while she murmured in a trembling voice: "Mi Padre!"

So this was Juan Rodriguez, who had been denounced but a moment since by the terrible

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Katipunan society, come to answer in person to the charge!

Another native followed him closely; neither were masked, and Phil recognized, in startled wonder, Colonel Martinez.

"Fellow countrymen," Rodriguez exclaimed in a loud, commanding voice, "I have obeyed your summons, but I shall not join the society. I shall never take sides in this war until I feel in my heart that to do so will better my countrymen. You who are deceiving the Americans, pretending that you are loyal and yet aiding your countrymen to kill them, doubtless believe that you are doing your country a service, but I know that in the end you will bring terrible suffering on our people. Take the field and fight openly and honorably, and you will be treated by your enemy as a brave antagonist, but fight with a knife, stabbing your enemy in the back, under the guise of friendship, and the end is surely the gallows tree."

A murmur of harsh voices filled the room as Rodriguez stopped speaking.

All eyes were turned to this striking figure, as the light from many candles revealed the

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finely moulded face, flashing eyes and firmly chiseled lips and chin.

As Phil watched, his eyes opened wider in dread. The leader had edged, during the long speech, nearer and yet nearer to Rodriguez. Martinez was standing silently on the other side. Phil's anxious gaze caught the flash of brightly polished steel in the hands of this masked native, now but a few feet from his intended victim. Maria saw, but her voice was frozen within her. Phil gauged the distance to the would-be murderer, for his intention was only too evident. It was not over fifty paces. Surely it was possible; he had often practiced at that distance. His revolver was now pointing at the Katipunan leader, whose hand could be seen to be stealthily rising. Phil steadied one shaking hand with the other and pulled the trigger. The loud report of the discharge was deafening, and below in an instant all was the wildest confusion. Swiftly all lights were extinguished and the room was plunged into inky darkness.

"Come," Phil urged excitedly, "we must get O'Neil and save Juan Rodriguez."

Blindly they felt for the stairs and quickly

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descended ; then hand in hand they ran along the dark, slippery tunnel. Reaching the street Phil gave a low whistle, which soon brought O'Neil and his men.

" Did you fire a shot ? " the sailor asked anxiously. " We thought we heard one, but it seemed a long ways off."

" Yes," Phil replied, " but follow us ; there's work to be done ; the señorita's father is in danger."

Led by the native, Lopez, each sailor with his revolver drawn sped down the narrow street. At the corner they saw a small band of men approaching. Phil halted his party and waited ready to attack if they turned out to be enemies. The next moment Maria had thrown herself into her father's arms, and was sobbing hysterically, while his native followers withdrew to some distance and stood on guard in respectful silence.

Phil and Sydney wrung the hand of their former captor Martinez.

" What would Captain Blynn say now ? " Phil exclaimed laughingly as O'Neil too squeezed the colonel's hand until the latter winced. " He'd shoot us for traitors sure."

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Sydney smiled. "It would be rather difficult to explain the situation," he replied, the drollness of the meeting suddenly striking him.

"You saved my life, señor," Rodriguez exclaimed suddenly, as Maria led him to the Americans. "My daughter has told me all. I do not know how she could have gone where she did, or how she found out that I had been summoned, but bringing you there has shown that often one's greatest enemy lives in one's house and eats his bread. I came this evening bringing with me my own men, for I know these blackguards too well to trust myself alone. As all were masked I recognized no one, but I have suspicions as to many and especially he who you probably have killed, for he fell limply at my feet just before the lights were extinguished."

A sudden pang of remorse came into Phil's thoughts.

"Colonel Martinez came with me as my friend and protector," said Rodriguez, "and although he is an enemy within your lines I ask that he be allowed to withdraw in safety. You see," he added with a smile, "we had no idea of meeting those who would recognize him."

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Phil as the leader of the Americans gave a ready assent. He well knew that a strict interpretation of his duty required that he arrest Colonel Martinez on the spot and take him prisoner before the general, but intuitively he realized that to do so would hurt the American cause. He felt that Rodriguez had reached a crisis in his avowed intention of neutrality. By arresting Martinez after this appeal Phil might lose the government a valuable friend, now wavering between his loyalty to his own people and the more earnest duty of fighting against them to protect them from the domination of this treacherous band of murderers.

"Good-bye, señores," Maria cried eagerly, as her father signified his intention to depart. "I can never thank you enough for what you have done to-night. If your bullet," she added earnestly, "has silenced forever that terrible leader of the Katipunan society, my father will be in no further danger."

"Can you pass through the lines?" Sydney asked, "or shall we vouch for you?"

"If it is not too much trouble," Rodriguez replied gratefully. "My carriage is just there,

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and we are then near the last patrol. The general has allowed me free conduct always, but this disturbance may have aroused suspicion, so I shall be grateful for your services."

The mixed party of sailors and natives walked briskly through the silent streets. The carriage drawn by two fast horses was reached, and Maria, her father, and Martinez entered, while Lopez mounted the box and drove slowly forward followed by the Americans on foot.

A loud American challenge suddenly brought the horses on their haunches.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Officer," answered Phil.

"Advance one, and be recognized," the sentry called.

Phil walked slowly forward until he was within ten paces of the alert soldier.

"Halt."

Phil stopped in his tracks.

"I guess you're a naval officer," the soldier said in a puzzled voice. "You're too young to be a brigadier-general, although you've got a star there on your shoulder-strap."

Phil smiled.

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"Yes, sentry, I am Captain Perry of the gunboat."

"Sure, sir, you can pass me, any time," the soldier exclaimed gladly. "That was certainly great work you done in Binalbagan. All the boys is talking about you two officers and Jack O'Neil. I'd like to meet him; he must be a corker." The sentry had grounded his rifle and now stood at ease talking sociably, very much at home with the young midshipman.

"He is here," Phil replied. "If I may pass my party, I'll call him."

"Certainly, captain, anything you say goes with me," the sentry returned enthusiastically.

The carriage, followed by the band of a dozen natives, drove down the street away from the city. Phil caught a wave of a hand from the window as he turned and started for the gunboat and his bunk, for it was near midnight.

O'Neil had stopped to shake hands with the admiring sentry and he soon overtook them.

In silence they marched to the ship. So

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much had happened, crowded into such a short space of time, that the lads wanted a chance to think.

The next morning while Phil and Sydney were at breakfast on the small quarter-deck of the "Mindinao" Captain Blynn crossed the gangway from the dock. He walked to where the lads had risen from their chairs to greet him. Refusing their offer of breakfast with an impatient movement of his hand he sat down in the proffered seat held for him by the attentive Chinese steward. Both lads saw in his grave face that something unpleasant had happened to account for this early morning visit. The army man did not keep them long in suspense, and had his say with his usual directness.

"Lieutenant Tillotson, the officer of the guard yesterday, is missing. His bed shows that he did not sleep in it at all last night. I have investigated the case as far as I have been able, and I find that no one passed through the sentries except a closed carriage and a squad of Filipinos. This sentry says that you and Mr. Monroe vouched for them. Tillotson was last seen an hour before this

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time by a sentry at the bridge whom he visited. As soon as I heard of the carriage episode I cautioned the sentry to say nothing. I wanted to see you and clear up that part before I investigated further."

Phil sat speechless in his seat while the judge-advocate general talked on earnestly. Tillotson had disappeared! How could he have been forcibly carried past the numerous guards stationed at every outlet of the garrisoned city? He must surely still be within the town.

"Do you suspect foul play?" Phil questioned. "Would the enemy have the daring to make way with him inside the town? Why should he alone be molested? And, besides, he carried his revolver, and could not be struck down without being able to fire a warning shot."

"One sentry," the captain replied quickly, "reported having heard a shot from the part of town near the sea, but he said it was very indistinct, and after all he was not sure."

Phil and Sydney exchanged glances and the captain looked up sharply, a faint suspicion entering his thoughts.

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"What I'd like to know," he added coldly, "is who was in that closed carriage; the sentry says there were four people."

Phil flushed as he read the insinuation in the captain's voice.

"Juan Rodriguez, his daughter and a Filipino overseer by the name of Lopez," he answered promptly, but he lowered his eyes before the direct, searching gaze of the judge-advocate general. The presence of Colonel Martinez need not be told. It would but complicate the case and not aid in the search for Tillotson; but the army officer knew human nature too accurately, and Phil was too poor a hand at telling less than the truth.

"There was besides a Filipino with the driver?" he questioned pointedly.

Phil shook his head in the negative.

"Was this Lopez within the carriage with Señor Rodriguez and his daughter?" the captain asked curtly, and Phil felt as if he were on the witness stand having the whole truth dragged from him. He might just as well make a clean breast of it. Before those piercing black eyes, he found that he was not good at dissembling.

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"Lopez was driving," Phil said blushing furiously in mortification at being so easily tripped in his testimony. "The other occupant of the carriage was Colonel Martinez!"

If a bombshell had exploded at Captain Blynn's feet he could not have appeared more astounded.

"And you passed this insurgent officer out of our lines?" he asked incredulously.

Phil nodded, his throat dry and his mind stunned with a sudden fear.

"This is certainly a queer proceeding!" the army man exclaimed. "I cannot fathom it. Do you realize what you have done? Can you not see that Lieutenant Tillotson's disappearance will be laid at your door? But surely," he added, "there is some explanation which you can make? You could hardly be so foolish as to plot against the life or even the liberty of a brother officer."

Phil gave a sudden exclamation of surprised indignation, and with flashing eyes he turned angrily on his accuser.

"I didn't see your meaning at first," he said in a low, intense voice but one that carried distinctly over the ship. "How dare you to

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insinuate this to my face and on board my ship?—Captain Blynn, there's the gangway!" he cried sternly, his face now deathly pale but his jaw set firmly.

Captain Blynn rose hurriedly from his chair, his dark face swollen with passion; his black eyes flashed, while his strong hands clutched his chair nervously. He was about to speak, but Phil cut him short, pointing his finger toward the exit to the deck.

"I hope, Captain Blynn," he said quietly though his lips were trembling, "that you will see the uselessness of further talk and will go ashore as I have bid you."

"You confounded little whipper-snapper!" the captain exploded wrathfully. The stern judge-advocate was unused to such treatment; he had always bullied those under him and in a measure by the very force of his will, many of those senior to him in rank. But angry as he was he realized that the midshipman was quite within his rights. He was on board his own ship, and there he was supreme.

"Captain Blynn, I hope it will not be necessary for me to have you escorted across

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the gangway," Phil reiterated, his voice showing perfect control of temper. The lad glanced forward meaningly to where many of the crew had collected, intently listening to the heated colloquy between their young captain and this big, blustering army officer.

Then a voice from the dock made both the combatants turn suddenly and gaze in surprise at the general, who, unobserved, had stopped abreast them and had been an amused spectator of the discomfiture of his judge-advocate.

"I'll tear up that telegram as soon as I get to the office," he exclaimed chuckling gleefully; "and, Blynn, you'd better come ashore here before Captain Perry pitches you over the gangway."

Captain Blynn had but one great fault and that was his inability to consider that anything mattered outside of his beloved work. Ruthlessly he would trample over those in the way of success. Once he was on the trail of a wrong-doer, he would follow it fearlessly until the culprit was behind bars.

Doubtless if Captain Blynn had stopped for just a moment and considered the young of-

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ficer before him, he would not have cut him to the quick by an insinuation so cruel. To do the brusque captain justice, he had regretted his words immediately he had spoken and seen the look of injured innocence and anger in Phil's face, but the masterful way in which Phil had turned the tables on him was too much for the army man's temper and hence the invective. In his heart he did not really believe that Phil was guilty of plotting against Tillotson. Without the interruption from the dock he might even have apologized to the spirited young navy man, but the general's words injected a salutary humor into this dramatic situation and made him see how untenable and cruel was the attitude he had assumed. His face softened and an apology of a smile struggled for place on his sun-tanned countenance. "You're dead game, youngster," he exclaimed impetuously. "I believe you're on the level, only you're a bit too reticent; anyway, here's my hand, and from now on we'll work together instead of at cross purposes." He took the surprised midshipman's hand and shook it heartily.

"Come up to the office at ten o'clock," he

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added as he walked toward the gangway, the smile having disappeared and the alert business expression taking its place on his face.

The midshipmen watched him cross the gangway and join the general, who had been taking his usual morning exercise before going to his office, and as the two walked along apparently deep in conversation an orderly stopped them, handing a telegram to the general. The lads saw him open it and read and then pass it to Captain Blynn. Both turned as if by a mutual impulse and glanced toward the gunboat, then changing their minds apparently, they again turned and walked briskly toward the headquarters building.

"Something in the telegram concerns us in some way," exclaimed the analytical Sydney. "I wonder what it said?" But Phil's mind was too much occupied in thinking of the chameleon character of his new friend to give more than a passing thought to the contents of the telegram.

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CHAPTER XI

A TRAITOR UNMASKED

"How dared he accuse me of knowing about Tillotson's disappearance?" Phil exclaimed as he sought unsuccessfully a solution to the mystery.

"I don't believe he really suspected us," Sydney replied deprecatingly, "but it must have struck him as odd to say the least that you should pass an insurgent officer through the guards. You didn't tell him why you did it or even give him any of the circumstances. I think it was natural that he should act as he did."

"I didn't realize," Phil said half laughing, "how queer it must have seemed to him. Well, I'm going up and make a clean breast of it.

"Have you any suspicion as to the identity of the man I shot?" Phil suddenly asked.

"I thought at once of Espinosa," Sydney answered, "but I'm not sure; he talked in a

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voice that was not familiar, but that may have been feigned. Think of it," he exclaimed, "those masked men are all in the employ of our government. They have taken the oath of allegiance and yet they are plotting to massacre our soldiers."

"It seems queer," Phil exclaimed in a puzzled voice, "that the meeting and Tillotson's disappearance should happen the same evening. Do you suppose it was only a coincidence?"

Sydney shook his head.

"Let's get Captain Blynn to unravel that," he answered. "He's not half as clever as some believe, not to have discovered in six months what we have in less than two days. But remember, we promised Señorita Maria to say nothing of her share in the work."

An hour later the lads had laid their startling discoveries before the judge-advocate.

"How many of these men did you count?" he asked excitedly, after he had listened with rising indignation to the account of the Katipunan meeting and the accusation against Rodriguez.

"About forty, I should say," Phil answered.

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"I don't understand," the captain exclaimed aloud, "why Espinosa has not told me of the existence of this society. Of course I knew it was active elsewhere, but I had no idea they would dare plot against us within our lines."

"Have you never suspected Espinosa?" Phil asked quietly.

"Yes, once," the captain answered, after a moment's hesitation, "but I found I was mistaken. He would not have led us against this fellow Martinez if he had been a traitor. I have the note here which I took from Espinosa that gives the information. It is in Visayan but I have translated it." He handed the scrap of paper to Phil, who read it and passed it back.

"Colonel Martinez and two hundred men encamp to-night at Barotoc Hill near Banate en route to join Diocno."

Phil pondered over the words of the message. Then he remembered the terrible personal attack of Espinosa against Martinez. Was this a clue to his betrayal? Were Martinez and Espinosa personal enemies?

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"No," the captain continued assuredly. "Espinosa has aided us in every way. It was through him that we sent Captain Gordon to the north to prevent more of these deserters from Aguinaldo's army landing. He has kept us well posted on the movements of our enemy."

"But still," Phil insisted, "there have been no big fights and we've lost a number of men cut up through surprise."

"That's due in a great measure to the country and the inexperience of our volunteer officers," the captain explained readily.

"Are you so sure of the honesty of Rodriguez?" he asked suddenly. "I have heard it insinuated that he aspires to the leadership if Diocno were removed."

Phil was about to cry out his assured belief that Rodriguez was sincere, but with the words on his lips he hesitated. He had seen Rodriguez but once, and to be convinced of his honesty after such a short acquaintance would sound ridiculous. He saw that Maria's part would have to be told if Captain Blynn was to be convinced.

"I have every reason to believe in his

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sincerity," Phil said instead. "I can understand Spanish and I heard the leader denounce him as a traitor to the natives. Then I heard Rodriguez's eloquent appeal to the men against their two-faced dealings. He surely had the courage of his convictions, for every hand there was against him."

"Yes, the general had him down here the other day," the captain said, "and he was impressed the same way. He's a power among the lower classes, although he has many enemies among the educated ones."

Captain Blynn had been holding a telegram in his hand while the above conversation was taking place and now he passed it over in silence for Phil to read.

"Colonel Martinez is not the name of insurgent officer that left Manila about the time of sailing of steamer 'Negros.' Our secret service men are sure that he is the noted outlaw 'Remundo.'"

"So you see," the captain said not unkindly, "you have twice allowed this desperado to escape.

"But now," the captain continued, "what

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we've got to do is to break up this secret society and find poor Tillotson if he is still alive. I can hardly believe that they have been able to carry him away unless it was by water. However, Espinosa should know of this. I will send for him to come here at once."

The captain rang his bell and sent the orderly who answered for the Filipino.

The midshipmen sat silently waiting while the judge-advocate returned to his interrupted office work.

The orderly soon returned, reporting that Señor Espinosa was not at his house, and that his servant reported that he had not been home since the evening before.

The midshipmen exchanged knowing glances. Was Espinosa then the leader whom Phil had shot?

"Come!" Captain Blynn exclaimed, starting up from his chair. He led the lads down to his carriage at the door and motioned them to enter. Then giving an address to the driver they went whirling through the narrow streets.

After a ten minutes' drive the carriage

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stopped in front of a large Filipino house. Without knocking the army man pushed open the door intruding his great bulk into the room.

A half dozen natives arose from the floor, sudden fear in their faces as they saw the officers.

"Señor Cardero," the captain said in a quiet voice, "where has Señor Espinosa gone?"

"I do not know," the native replied sullenly.

The captain glared fiercely at the small brown man before him; then he reached out a strong hand and caught the native fiercely by the neck, shaking him as a dog would a rat. The little man turned a sickly color and his teeth chattered, but the bullying American held him closely while his eyes flashed angrily as he questioned him. "Tell me, where is Señor Espinosa?"

"He is hurt, señor commandante," the native cried out finally in a terrified voice after he had regained his breath. "It was an accident. I do not now know where he is, but he is not in the city."

The midshipmen were overjoyed at this news. So Espinosa was the Katipunan

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leader and spy. Phil glanced at the surprised judge-advocate, a light of triumph in his eyes.

"Captain Perry," the captain ordered hurriedly, "you and Mr. Monroe stay here and guard these rats; I am going to have every native of prominence in the town arrested at once. Thanks to you, we have at last found the leak."

Throwing the cringing native from him, he strode out of the door, and the lads heard the rumble of his carriage wheels as he drove rapidly away.

After the captain's menacing presence had been removed the half dozen captive Filipinos showed signs of restlessness, and once or twice Phil surprised a covert glance toward a dark corner of the large living-room. Both lads felt the responsibility of their position. They knew that they were outside of the line of sentries, almost beyond the sound of firearms. It seemed to Phil that the captain was over-reckless in coming with only themselves into the haunts of a probable enemy. Both lads were armed, their revolvers were held ready in hand and their

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prisoners knew full well that Americans were dangerous shots.

The inside of the room was but dimly lighted by a single oil wick, and the darkness became blacker toward that part of the house where no windows had been cut. Phil had heard the captain give instructions to his orderly as he left headquarters to have a guard follow the carriage. But would the guard be sent here to aid them, or would Captain Blynn send them elsewhere to make arrests?

"Let's get out of this trap," Phil whispered anxiously to Sydney at his side, his idea being to order the men at the point of his revolver to pass out to the street.

Suiting the action implied in his words, Phil opened the door leading from the living-room. He saw by the aid of the additional light from outside that the five men had cautiously and stealthily moved backward toward the wall nearest them, and were apparently supporting their weights upon it. Suddenly he felt a jar and read in the eyes of the Filipino nearest him revenge battling with fear. Then the floor shook, and grasp-

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ing Sydney by the shoulder Phil threw himself bodily through the open door as the floor of the building crashed down twenty feet into the cellar below. The natives, he could see, were hung on the wall like so many old coats, while through the bamboo floor on which he and Sydney had just stood numberless bamboo spears bared their sharp, venomous points. The lad shuddered as he realized the murderous trick which had failed. If they had fallen with the floor, heavily weighted as it was with stones at the side, and resting on supports, which had been dislodged by a rope in the hands of one of the villains now hanging on the wall of the room, they would at this moment be lying pierced through and perhaps dying before the eyes of their cruel enemy.

He raised his revolver and covered the nearest cringing native, a terrible anger in his eyes. In another second he would have pulled the trigger, but Sydney's hand closed firmly over his wrist, forcing his revolver upward and the ball sped harmlessly over the terrified native's head.

"They are more valuable alive," Sydney

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exclaimed to Phil's angry cry of protest. "Come, let's get outside before more of this hinged floor is loosened. We can better prevent their escape in that way."

Phil followed his companion down the bamboo stairs and into the street, where a crowd of curious natives had gathered on hearing the startling shot. The lads moved their weapons menacingly, not knowing or trusting the temper of the crowd which backed away cringingly from the Americans. A glance down the street brought a glad cry from the midshipmen as they saw a squad of soldiers advancing from the direction of headquarters. A loud voice in the Visayan tongue from the building they had just left was answered by many excited voices in the gathered crowd, and then several women advanced slowly, holding up their hands in sign of peace, their bodies close together as if for mutual protection. The lads scarcely noticed the approach of the women, so occupied were they in watching the building in which were imprisoned five of the traitors who had been biting the hand of the master that fed them. A swift glance over his shoulder showed Phil

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that the advancing women were scarce ten paces away from Sydney, who was guarding one corner of the house, while he was some thirty feet away, guarding the other three sides. The soldiers were not over a block away and hastening toward him; he could hear the rattle of their gun slings, and the thud of their heavy shoes on the hard road-bed. Then again as he cast an uneasy glance at this line of women his heart froze within him while his voice failed, for he had caught a fleeting glimpse of a savage face peering over their shoulders.

"Look out for yourself," Phil cried, directing his revolver at the line of women and firing blindly. In that second his disgust and wrath were so great at the dastardly strategy under the guise of friendship that he would not have felt a qualm of conscience if one of these unnatural women had fallen before his bullet.

The women halted, sudden fear on their faces, while from between them dashed a half dozen savage natives armed with bolos. As they charged on the surprised midshipmen they cried out lustily in their guttural lan-

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guage the war cry of the bolo-man who has received the charm of the Anting-Anting which to his superstitious mind makes him invulnerable against the Americans' bullets. They came boldly on while Sydney jumped backward quickly to Phil's side and the two lads emptied the contents of their revolvers into the mass of naked brown men flourishing their keen blades above their heads in an endeavor to close with their hated foe. The women had run screaming with terror back to the safety of the crowd, taking refuge within the densely packed houses.

With their revolvers empty and but three of their half dozen assailants writhing in the road, the plucky midshipmen faced the onrush of the fanatics. Converting their revolvers into clubs, they awaited what seemed to them certain death. Their one hope for safety lay in running away from the charging bolo-men and toward the soldiers now scarce two hundred yards away, but turn their backs on an enemy they could not.

Within ten feet of the midshipmen the fanatics suddenly stopped and a fear crept into their superstitious faces. The next

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second, to the lads' astonishment, their sharp swords dropped from nerveless fingers, and the three natives prostrated themselves in the dust of the road.

The lads gazed in startled wonder, scarcely believing their eyes.

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CHAPTER XII

THE MIDSHIPMEN RECONNOITRE

THE midshipmen were so utterly astonished at the actions of their fanatical enemies that they could only gasp out their surprise in one heartfelt word of relief. Then a familiar voice at their elbow awoke them from their stupefied inactivity. It was in Visayan and they turned to gaze into the impassive face of Rodriguez.

"I have ordered them to escape," he added in Spanish, casting a quick glance toward the squad of soldiers. "Poor fellows, it would be a pity to kill them, for they are but acting under orders."

The lads were too grateful to their rescuer for saving their lives to make useless inquiries as to why his influence could be exerted over the acts of their enemy. Phil's first thought was for the men whom the captain had left them to guard.

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"Surround this house," he commanded, and the sergeant in charge gave a short command and led the way himself to the rear of the large native building.

"It is too late, señor commandante," Rodriguez said shaking his head; "they have all escaped through the rear door and are by now safely away."

The midshipmen ran quickly up the steps and gazed disappointedly into the gloom beyond. The floor still lay at the bottom of the cellar, the bamboo spears sticking half-way through, but the natives had gone. The back door stood open and to the ground was a jump of twenty feet. They had safely escaped while the lads were engaged defending themselves against the attack of the bolo-men.

"I am on my way to see General Wilson," Rodriguez announced after a search had failed to disclose any signs of the fugitives, "and offer my services."

"Do you mean that you will fight with us against the insurgents?" Phil asked in glad surprise.

"Yes, from now on I shall aid the Americans to restore order in the island of Kapay,"

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Rodriguez replied, pleased at the cordial reception given him by the two midshipmen.

Together the party made their way back to headquarters in search of Captain Blynn.

"It was providential that I happened along," Rodriguez said after they had passed through the sentries; "those bolo-men knew me and obeyed my sign. I see," he added smilingly, "that you are already arresting the traitors."

"We were not very successful with Señor Cardero and his friends yonder," Sydney exclaimed ruefully, "but I suppose we should be thankful to have gotten off so easily."

"Cardero is one of the craftiest of our outlaws," Rodriguez returned. "It is a marvel to me how he could have remained unmasked so long. Of course," he added, "I have known of this intrigue for some months, but until they deliberately plotted against my life I could not betray them."

"Have you discovered who is the Katipunan leader who tried to murder you last night?" Sydney asked excitedly.

"Yes," Rodriguez replied. "You have doubtless guessed that he was Espinosa. I

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know it now for sure. He has gone to Matiginao, where there is a strong fort, and is in command of all the insurgent forces there. The bullet only crippled him last night, and I hear he is rapidly recovering. General Diocno was murdered last night in his bed and no doubt I should have shared the same fate."

They were by this time at the headquarters building, and were glad to find that Captain Blynn had returned. The midshipmen informed the army man of their luckless adventure and stood in silence expecting to hear his harsh rebuke for allowing such important prisoners to escape, but he only grasped their hands and congratulated them upon their rare good fortune.

"By George," he exclaimed excitedly, "we've been contentedly living over an active volcano. It's a marvel we haven't all been massacred long ago.

"Every native of any consequence in the town has departed," he added sadly.

"Rodriguez with you, and wishes to aid us?" he cried gladly, as Phil told of the intention of the wealthy native. "Well, that certainly is cheering news."

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Rodriguez came into the office and stood with dignified bearing before the big judge-advocate.

"So you are tired of being neutral?" the army officer said pointedly in Spanish. "Do you wish to occupy the position just vacated by our mutual friend Espinosa?"

Rodriguez drew himself up proudly while the midshipmen gasped at this harsh arraignment.

"I do not blame you, señor," the native answered, no evidence of anger on his placid face. "I know that you can have but little reason to trust the honesty of the men of my race. But I do not desire a position. I am now ready to take the field with my men, heretofore neutral. I have three hundred rifles."

"You are ready then to take the oath of allegiance?" Captain Blynn asked in official tones.

"Yes, señor, and keep it," Rodriguez returned, his eyes unflinching.

"Have you any news that will lead to our knowing the whereabouts of Lieutenant Tillotson?" Blynn asked.

"Ah, I have," the native answered eagerly.

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"I was about to ask you—my spies report a captive with Espinosa."

The Americans gave sighs of relief. At least Tillotson was alive.

General Wilson received Señor Rodriguez with marked courtesy and appointed him on the spot a colonel in command of his own men whom he offered to enlist as native troops, rationing and feeding them from army funds, but Rodriguez declined the latter, agreeing to defray all expenses.

The midshipmen insisted that their new ally should go down to the dock and inspect the gunboat, so after explaining to General Wilson that they would like to be absent for a few days on reconnaisance work, the three strolled leisurely down the street.

"Where is Colonel Martinez?" Phil asked after they had arrived on board and the Chinese servant had brought refreshments.

Rodriguez shrugged his shoulders and pointed toward the interior of the island.

"Will he serve under Espinosa as leader?" Sydney asked incredulously.

"Who knows?" Rodriguez answered evasively.

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The lads saw that their friend had reasons for being non-committal and tactfully ceased their interrogation, yet inwardly they were consumed with curiosity. Espinosa had attempted to kill Colonel Martinez on the morning of Blynn's attack, and now would they serve amicably side by side against a common enemy?

The hour for lunch arrived, and as Rodriguez was not leaving for several hours to return to his home up the river he gladly accepted the midshipmen's pressing invitation to eat with them.

Phil had made up his mind to explore the river, though this idea was unformed in his mind when he left headquarters.

During the meal the midshipmen questioned their guest about Espinosa's impregnable stronghold and of its approach by water.

"There is a trail from my ranch to the foot of the mountain," Rodriguez replied thoughtfully, "but it will be filled with traps, and will be dangerous if Espinosa hears an attack is to be attempted. The river flows through a narrow gorge at Matiginao, and

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from the cliffs huge boulders can be dropped into the river many hundred feet below.

"The gunboat!" he exclaimed in amazement, after Phil had questioned in regard to the depth of water. "If it were possible!" Rodriguez glanced admiringly at the heavy cannon mounted near him. "Yes, with this gunboat in the river the tops of the cliffs could be swept, and soldiers could scale the difficult trail unopposed, and once through the narrows the trail leading from the stronghold could be commanded by the cannon to cut off the retreat of the insurgents. It is wonderful! But the bridge, Señor Perry," he ended, his voice betraying his sudden disappointment; "it is strongly built and a gunboat cannot pass."

"If I find there's water enough to float the 'Mindinao,'" Phil replied assuredly, "the bridge will not stand in the way long.

"Does your daughter know the country?" Phil asked earnestly.

Rodriguez gazed a full minute at his questioner before he answered.

"Every foot of it," he added; "she was born near the stronghold. But what is your

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intention, señor? This is no work for a woman."

Phil would willingly have bitten off his tongue for having led him into such an embarrassing situation. He could not tell Rodriguez that he wanted Maria because she alone would he trust as a guide on the perilous mission which he had made up his mind to make.

Major Marble fortunately arrived at this moment and saved the lad from becoming more deeply involved. He gave them the latest news.

"Tillotson's father is keeping the wires hot," he told them. "We are ordered to spare nothing to recapture him, but of course we shall do that anyway. The general has wired back the good news the señor has brought, that Tillotson is believed to be a prisoner and alive."

Before the party dispersed, Phil confided to his hearers his plan to explore the river and his intention to start that very night.

"Then you will visit me on my ranch?" Rodriguez exclaimed gladly. "Everything I have is at your service," he added with the grandiloquent air of a Spanish gentleman.

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Phil nodded gratefully, realizing that unlike the Spaniard, whose form of address the native copied, Rodriguez made no empty offer.

"I believe," the lad continued, a spark of enthusiasm in his voice, "that a gunboat of the tonnage of this vessel is capable of reaching the insurgent stronghold."

"If you can accomplish that," Major Marble exclaimed excitedly, "you and your 'Mindinao' will make an enviable name for yourselves, for once that stronghold is taken we shall have many surrenders throughout the island."

"Why not force the insurgents to concentrate on Matiginao," Phil asked earnestly, "and attack them there?"

"The general has already sent out orders," Major Marble told them, smiling at the lad's eagerness, "to attack the insurgents wherever they can be located and for all the troops to concentrate on Palilo, leaving small garrisons in the towns to guard the peaceful natives. He is working up a big plan to attack this stronghold with a large force, and will undoubtedly take the field in person. He is determined to rescue Tillotson, and will give

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Espinosa no rest until he is captured or killed."

The midshipmen listened in delight to this plan, which fitted in so well with their own ideas.

The major soon departed, promising short work in destroying the bridge if the lads discovered the river to be navigable above the house of Rodriguez.

O'Neil was ordered to have a boat's crew of four men ready to leave the gunboat at one o'clock at night. The distance to Rodriguez's ranch was somewhat over fifteen miles and the lads did not desire to be seen, so they would pass at night and be safely within friendly land by sunrise. Rodriguez left them soon after to return by land and promised a hearty welcome on their arrival up the river.

Promptly at one o'clock the expedition started. O'Neil had provided the usual gear for surveyors; a compass, a lead line, and also a rifle for each man and a revolver for himself.

Silently they shoved off and rowed with muffled oars up the river, and under the bridge, built substantially in the days of the

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Spaniards. "A few charges of dynamite would settle it," Phil thought.

Already O'Neil had uncoiled his lead line and was sounding in the channel of the river.

"It'll be a cinch, sir," the boatswain's mate exclaimed after several soundings had given him no less than four fathoms of water. "Seven feet is all we need and we can carry that for miles until the mountains commence to go up steep; then there'll be rocks to look out for."

Mile after mile was pulled in silence except for the light dip of the oars and the dull, almost soundless splash of the lead as it was heaved a short distance forward of the boat.

The midshipmen gazed with apprehension at the forbidding banks of the river. The rank tropical foliage would conceal an army. Riflemen might lie concealed and fire without the slightest fear of discovery.

Gradually the river narrowed, but the depth of water did not grow less.

It was just before dawn when the boat arrived at the bend behind which, by the description given them, would be the landing pier of the Rodriguez ranch.

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In a half hour the boat was being cared for by one of the many willing attendants and the sailors were escorted to the palatial residence of Señor Rodriguez.

It was the señorita who came first to meet her old friends.

"Now we are fighting together," she exclaimed gladly, "and I would like to go out as a man and help."

Phil thought that nothing so far had deterred her. She had seen as much fighting as most men and had withstood it bravely, and he said so to her.

"You might be valuable, señorita, to put courage in men's hearts," Sydney added smiling, "but you would not be very formidable as a soldier."

Maria bit her lips vexedly.

"I can shoot as well as a man," she cried half angrily, "and I can ride a horse and paddle a canoe. What more is needed?"

"Something which is not in your make-up," Phil answered admiringly. "You are not vindictive and are not cruel. But you can do us a favor, if you will. We want to explore the country between here and Matiginao."

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Maria clapped her hands with joy.

"I know every foot of the country," she cried eagerly. "You couldn't have better guides than my little brother and I. But," she added, her voice becoming lower and a fear in her eyes, "my father is now an enemy to the ladrones and insurgents, and it is unsafe to wander away on the lonely trails."

Phil and Sydney exchanged glances as much as to say, "There is your woman's argument. One moment she wants to fight and the next she speaks of danger."

Señor Rodriguez welcomed the midshipmen, and together all sat down to a large table where a delicious breakfast was served.

Phil saw his men were provided for, as he intended leaving them behind, and after breakfast Maria led the party out where five finely bred horses were held by native grooms.

Maria and Juan, who sat his pony as gracefully as if he were a part of the animal, led the way across the open fields surrounding the ranch houses. Then they plunged into a path cleaving the giant trees of the tropical jungle. Limbs of trees brushed their faces

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and great care was necessary to prevent themselves from being unhorsed.

Phil's idea was for the boat to wait until dark, and then row up the river as far as possible and return by morning, in order that the general could be informed of the feasibility of the plan and the work of destroying the bridge started. His party, meanwhile, were bent on following this trail toward Matiginao, to reach the ranch before the boat and wait for it. He realized that they were running a great risk, but he believed the necessity for the information was worth the risk run. The trail led mostly within sight of the snake-like river. They passed many dwellings, most of them deserted of all save hungry mongrels and starving pigs.

"This seems to be a fine trail," Sydney said surprisedly, as they walked their horses two abreast.

"It leads but five miles further," Maria replied, "and from where it ends, all other trails are those made by animals, and followed seldom by men."

At a brisk trot Maria started ahead. The

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jungle bent away from the road, leaving a high arched canopy over the heads of the travelers, through which the tropical sun shone with sullen impotence.

"There is a small bungalow up here," the girl announced in pleasurable anticipation. "We shall have our lunch there. Before the big house was built we lived there."

"How long has it been since you were there?" Sydney asked in sudden anxiety, the fear entering his mind that it might now have other occupants.

"Not for years, señor," the girl replied in a low voice. "It is very lonesome, besides there are many pulijanes[1] in the mountains."

The house soon appeared through the thick grove of cocoanut palms with its unkept lawn sloping gently to the river. The grass in front of the house was overhead high, and everything had grown wild and in luxuriant profusion. The house itself was in ruins.

While Maria and little Juan had taken charge of the horses and tethered them amid a good repast of alfalfa, the two lads strolled down to the river.

[1] Pulijanes—ladrones, outlaw

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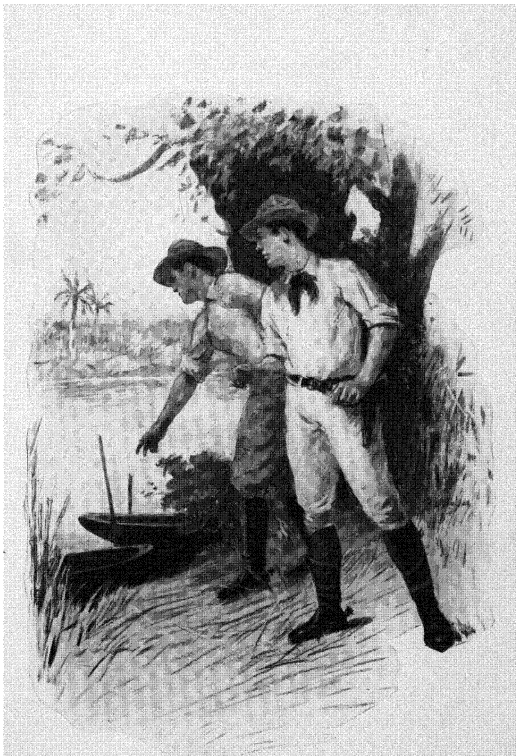

"HELLO, HERE ARE SOME CANOES!"

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"Hello, here are some canoes!" Phil exclaimed; "and they've been tied here recently," he added anxiously, as he saw clearly the fresh footprints and the grass trodden down near the landing.

The lads' intention had been to investigate the depth of the water in the river, but their startling discovery made them forget all else save the visible evidence that a small body of men had recently landed at this very spot and had taken the almost obliterated trail to the abandoned house. Maria and her brother might even now be prisoners among their enemy. The two midshipmen gazed at each other through eyes wide with apprehension. What was to be done?

"We can't desert the girl," Sydney declared, gazing at the trodden grass. "Otherwise we might reach the horses and escape before they discover us."

"Come," Phil exclaimed, "there are not many of them, and maybe," he added reassuringly, "they are not all armed."

The two lads walked noiselessly toward the house along the dim trail.

The building was now in plain sight. The

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wide porch with its profusion of clinging vines was deserted. The long flight of bamboo steps was half in ruins. To the right not a hundred yards distant their horses were standing, their noses deep in the rich grass.

At the foot of the steps the midshipmen halted. There was a mysterious silence in the air about them and they imagined that from the deserted building unfriendly eyes were peering down upon them.

Phil gave a sigh of relief as he saw Maria, leading little Juan, come slowly through the tall grass toward them from the neighborhood of the horses. He made up his mind quickly. Nothing further could be gained here, and the evidence that others had been on this spot very recently was too strong not to take the warning. He caught Sydney's arm and wheeled him away from the house. The lads had not taken a half dozen steps before a shrill cry from Maria riveted them in their tracks. Over their shoulders they saw that now the porch was filled with natives who were pointing their rifles at them menacingly.

"Come on, we might as well face them,"

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Phil whispered, his teeth tightly clenched and with his hand on his pistol.

Turning, Phil led the way back to the steps, and there he halted, glancing inquiringly at the unfriendly guns covering him.

A native, apparently an officer, dressed in a dull gray cotton uniform, walked slowly toward him down the rickety steps.

"How dare you insult me and my friends on my own door-step?" Maria's voice was high pitched in anger. "These gentlemen are my guests. By what right are you here?"

The Filipino officer had stopped half-way on the steps in surprise, his revolver held in front of him. Unconsciously he dropped its muzzle toward the ground and regarded the girl in unfeigned admiration.

"Pardon, señorita," he said apologetically, using the Spanish of the higher classes of Filipinos. "You, then, are Señorita Rodriguez, and I ask your forgiveness for my rudeness. I thought these señores," indicating the two midshipmen with a nod of his head, "were Americans and my enemies."

Phil's ears were startled by a loud peal of

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laughter, and he gazed in almost horror at the girl, believing that she had become hysterical. But a glance at her smiling face showed that her nerves were well in hand. An angry flush suffused his face as it crossed his mind that this was a trap of her own laying. But he blamed himself instantly for even entertaining such a thought. What would she say? She must acknowledge that he and Sydney were Americans, naval officers, though they were not in uniform, having on khaki riding suits. Phil's hand slowly drew out his revolver from its holster, while his eyes were turned now on the averted face of the native officer.

"From what part of the island have you come?" Maria asked quickly, the smile of superiority still on her face and Phil saw that to the native the smile was disconcerting.

"I am just from Matiginao," he replied. "I came for fresh meat. To forage on your father's land."

The smile died on Maria's face, but luckily the native had withdrawn his eyes and was regarding closely the young men before him.

Maria felt that the Filipino officer must

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know of her father's enmity to his new leader, Espinosa. Then as the native's eyes again traveled to her face the smile reappeared.

"I see all white men are to you Americans. These señores are my guests. I vouch for them," she told him in a confiding voice. "It was a natural mistake for you to make, Señor ——" she stopped questioningly, and he supplied the name. "Salas, colonel in the Filipino army, señorita, at your service," he said bowing gallantly.

Maria had not guessed at the officer's identity although she knew most of the important leaders, having known them as a girl at her father's house before the war had begun. Now the mention of his name almost made her heart stop beating. This frail creature, with the face and figure of a boy, was feared by all who had fallen under his control. He had won the unenviable reputation of being the most cruel of the insurgent leaders, first in Luzon under Aguinaldo and then on the island of Kapay. He was scarcely older than Phil, and yet he held the rank of colonel.

"Your name, señor," she smiled, "is one

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well known throughout Kapay. In appearance you are not the ogre that you are painted."

Colonel Salas' white, even teeth gleamed between his thin lips. He felt himself the master of the situation. Here was the proud daughter of Rodriguez complimenting him. His small soul was nourished by the thought that he was feared by all.

"Then, señorita," he said, "if you do not consider me an ogre, will you and your English friends accept the offer of a share in my frugal meal? It is now ready inside."

The midshipmen had watched with beating hearts this plucky girl's brave fence with the subtle native and as he pronounced the word English he glanced at the silent lads. Phil thought he saw a gleam of joy in his cruel eyes.

"They do not speak Spanish?" he asked, shrugging his shoulder expressively as much as to answer the question himself in the negative. It was better so; one could play the game better than two and the lads now knew that Maria was an adept in diplomacy, and could be depended upon to make a better and

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intelligent fight for their lives. That their lives were in danger was but too evident to the lads. The native soldiers still covered them with their rifles, and Colonel Salas had moved to Maria's side as they had talked, leaving the line of fire quite clear. A word from him and a score of bullets would be tearing through their bodies. Did the officer believe that they were English? Had he already seen through the deception, and made up his mind to maneuver so as to kill them at the least risk to himself and men? Phil gauged the distance between himself and the insolent face of this young colonel and resolved that the word of command to his men to fire should be a dear one for the smiling colonel.

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CHAPTER XIII

UNWELCOME COMPANIONS

THE lads indeed found themselves in an awkward predicament. Just the faintest thread really bound them to life, for they saw in the cruel expression in the eyes of the Filipino officer that nothing would delight him so much as to have these white men shot. Phil very much feared that in spite of his cordial words this boyish native had before now guessed the truth. However there was nothing to do but remain silent and inactive. Phil had a great desire to speak to Sydney in English, but he feared this dapper little Filipino might have learned enough of that language to understand what he might say.

With his cold eye on the midshipmen the native officer gave a gruff command to his men behind him on the porch. Phil's hand moved a hair's breadth, and the revolver muzzle on his hip pointed squarely at the body of Colonel Salas, while his finger pressed ever so

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slightly the trigger. For the fraction of a second their eyes met. Then the lad saw with relief that the soldiers had lowered their guns and were filing through the door into the house. With a deft motion he allowed his revolver to slip noiselessly back into its holster.

Colonel Salas had already turned and was leading the way up the steps, Maria and her brother following, and the midshipmen bringing up the rear.

"Do you think he suspects us?" Sydney whispered.

"He must," Phil answered hurriedly. "Be careful, Syd," he added anxiously. "We've got to fight our way out. There seems no other way. There are twenty of them against us two."

At the top of the steps Salas turned and looked questioningly at the midshipmen. Phil dared not meet his eye for fear that the little native would see the anxiety which he strove to hide.

On the floor of the big room a cloth had been spread and a repast set out.

With a graceful wave of his thin hands

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Colonel Salas made a sign for all to be seated and took, himself, the place beside Maria. Phil sat on the other side of Maria, while Sydney and little Juan were placed opposite.

Their brisk ride had given them all an appetite, but the terrible predicament in which they now found themselves had quite taken away their relish for food. The lads did their best to appear undisturbed, but any one with half an eye could have seen the restlessness behind their forced tranquillity.

It is not the Filipino custom to talk while eating, and it was not until his dish was emptied that Colonel Salas broke the awkward silence.

"Your English friends are very fond of adventure," he said suddenly. "Our camp is only a league up the river, and would be well worth a visit. I did not intend to return so soon, but I shall be glad to take you there. You can return to-day or remain until to-morrow morning. It is the strongest fortified camp in the islands, and has never been successfully attacked. You can see where three Spanish regiments were annihilated by having rocks rolled down upon them."

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Phil's heart beat faster. Here was the very opportunity he had wished for. If they could only see this camp with their own eyes; photograph the surroundings in their minds; test the depth of the water and the width of the channel, would it not be worth the fearful risk they would run? Then the thought of Espinosa drove the possibility of such a hazardous undertaking from his mind. They would then surely be recognized even if they had not been already, and he shuddered to think of the penalty. What was his astonishment when Maria agreed gladly to the plan.

"That would be fun, wouldn't it?" she cried in English, appealing to the utterly bewildered lads.

"Bueno! We can ride to 'El Salto de Diablo' (the devil's leap), and there I shall have 'bankas' ready to take us to the foot of the trail," Salas returned delightedly as he left them to instruct his men sleeping on the shady porch at the back of the house.

"Do you realize what you are doing?" Phil muttered excitedly. "At any moment he may discover who we really are. Suppose word should come to him from the city? We

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must not accept his invitation," he ended hurriedly.

"I fear," Maria whispered, "that he already suspects who you are, and for that reason I have accepted. If I refused we are already in his hands, and what can we do against his twenty rifles?

"We must act it out, and, if opportunity offers, escape. Above all, don't show by sign or word that you suspect him and don't show how much Spanish you know," she ended fearfully, as she saw Salas approaching with several of his men.

Phil's heart beat like a trip-hammer at this disquieting belief of Maria. She was certainly keen. By what system of argument had she arrived at such a conclusion? To Phil Salas had appeared to believe the story told by the girl. Sydney and Juan had listened attentively to her words.

In a short time the party were in motion. A horse had been captured from the herd of those that had run wild during the absence of their owner, and Salas sat it well. Phil thought he had never seen such a graceful horseman. The wild horse reared and plunged

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in its efforts to unseat the rider, but he could not be disturbed. The native followers formed about them, and the party moved slowly along the uneven road.

After a half hour's ride, Salas ordered a halt at the base of a bluff several hundred feet high. The midshipmen gazed with inward emotion at the towering cliffs ahead of them, through which ran like a torrent the muddy Tubig River.

"From here we must go by banka," the outlaw explained. "My men will go on foot, for they are accustomed to the rough trail; but for the señorita it would be impossible."

One of the natives approached his chief timidly, and spoke a few short sentences in a frightened voice.

On hearing the man's words, Salas' face darkened in anger and he struck him brutally with his heavy whip. The startled native recoiled in terror from his incensed master.

"He tells me that there is but one banka ready," he explained apologetically; "the other bankas are at the foot of the trail two miles up the river. The ones we used this morning I left at the ranch. I am sorry, but as only five

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can go in this boat some of the party must walk. Who shall it be?" he asked abruptly.

"There are just five of us," Maria suggested enthusiastically. "My brother and I are at home with a paddle and surely the señor colonel has often propelled his own boat."

Salas glanced keenly at the girl's face. He saw nothing there save youthful eagerness for adventure.

"As you wish," he replied carelessly. "It's a tedious journey: two miles against the swift current. My men are used to it."

But Maria's mind was set upon their going together. Phil pondered upon what her plan might be. The river was now narrow and the colonel's men would always be within hail.

"What shall we do with our horses?" Phil questioned. "Are we to return here?"

"I shall leave some men here with them," the Filipino leader assured him. "We shall either return by the way we came or else over the trail.

"Vamos," he concluded, waving his hand toward the large canoe which two of the natives were holding close up to the steep river bank.

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Maria took her place in the bow while the others distributed themselves evenly upon the frail low seats, grasping their paddles ready to balance the boat when it was cast adrift in the swift current.

Salas stood undecided upon the bank; his men had gone over the trail leading through the almost impenetrable jungle between them and the high palisade upon which was the outlaw's stronghold.

"Leave the horses here," he said finally to his two men, "and go back to the palm grove and bring up one of the canoes we left there this morning."

Phil from his seat in the stern of the banka caught a significant look flung to him out of the eyes of the girl who was seated in the bow, her head bent gracefully backward regarding the Filipino leader. In the rear of Maria was little Juan, his small hands grasping a paddle, much too large for his strength.

"Give the señor your paddle, Juan," the girl ordered, then turning to Salas she added persuasively, "Sit behind Juan, señor. I'm afraid he might fall overboard and I don't

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know what my father would do if anything should happen to him."

The outlaw smiled and took the empty seat, taking from the boy's unwilling hands the large paddle.

"Bueno," he exclaimed, while the two men released the boat, pushing it gently away out into the stream.

Under the strong strokes of four paddles, for the midshipmen were both expert, having owned canoes at the Naval Academy, the native boat swept swiftly through the water. To avoid the strength of the current the canoe was steered close in to the steep bank under the protecting shade of the overhanging trees. Great crocodiles basking on the muddy banks were passed, the animals slinking away as the boat approached, their long tails lashing furiously in their haste. Monkeys filled the trees, whistling and jabbering fearlessly as the boat passed under them.

While Phil exerted himself manfully at his paddle, his thoughts busily sought a plan to escape the enforced hospitality of Salas. A great fear filled his mind as he dwelt upon the horrors of imprisonment among these lawless

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men. To Sydney and him it would eventually mean death, and to Maria and her little brother a long and dangerous imprisonment and harsh treatment. But why had not Salas made them prisoners at once if he suspected their real identity? Phil did not guess that the outlaw had read defiance and action in the midshipmen's eyes, and alert as the outlaw's faculties had become to scent danger even though carefully concealed, he had detected the stealthy motion of Phil's hand when he had been confronted by his men. Salas was not a coward, but he had realized instantly that if he ordered his men to open fire, unless the first shots killed the Americans, he himself would fall the victim of their vengeance. So he was biding the time when he would have them safe without danger to himself.

The boat had now covered nearly half the distance. Phil wondered what he could do. The slight figure of the outlaw, seated upon the low thwart just in front of him, was so temptingly close and apparently so unconcious of any threatening danger. The native's revolver lay in its holster just within reach of the lad's hand, the flap securely buttoned

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upon its polished handle. Phil realized that when Salas expected treachery his first act would be to capsize the canoe. Being a strong swimmer the native doubtless believed he could reach the bank first and have at his mercy those still struggling in the water. To attempt to unbutton the flap of the holster and take the revolver without the owner's knowledge was impossible. Phil needed both of his hands to wield the heavy paddle and if he stopped paddling Salas would at once suspect treachery. His heart rose in his throat and his pulses throbbed painfully as a bold plan flashed suddenly into his thoughts. It seemed the one chance of escape. At the rate the boat was going it would soon be at the foot of the trail to the stronghold where Salas' men would be waiting in force to escort them up the steep incline to the top of the mountain. A huge crocodile lay asleep about a hundred yards ahead and this sight had awakened the plan to action in Phil's mind.

"Go slowly," he whispered loud enough to be heard by all in the boat. "Let's see if we can't get a shot at that big crocodile over there."

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Salas slowly drew in his paddle, laying it across his knees, while his hand went back to the holster strap.

"You keep paddling slowly, Syd, and the señorita can prevent us from capsizing when we fire," the lad continued eagerly. His own revolver still rested in its holster, while his eyes were bent upon the outlaw's hand fumbling with the buttoned flap. Mentally he measured the slight figure before him and then the frail boat in which they were seated. The terrible risk he was running came to him almost overpoweringly. Overboard in this river full of hungry crocodiles was unnerving enough to those who could swim, but Maria had said that her small brother could not, and for him death in this swift current would be assured. With his own paddle resting on his knees he braced his feet cautiously but firmly on the round of the bilge so as to put an equal pressure on each side. The outlaw, with his eyes on the crocodile as yet undisturbed in his doze, had succeeded in releasing the flap; his thumb and forefinger grasped lightly the revolver handle, drawing it slowly, thoughtfully, from its cover. Phil's hand was

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partly raised, as if he held his revolver ready to shoot at the formidable animal. He muttered a silent prayer that the crocodile would not awake before his plan had succeeded. He felt that out of the corner of his eye the outlaw was watching him, but Phil's hope was that his act would be so swift and unexpected that Salas would have no time to avoid it and jeopardize the lives of those in the boat.

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CHAPTER XIV

CLEVERLY OUTWITTED

As Salas' hand slowly drew his revolver from its holster, Phil's right hand with the speed of a mongoos seizing its prey clutched the slender wrist of the outlaw; the lad's left hand had moved deftly to the slack of the native's strong khaki trousers, and the next second he had raised the surprised Filipino from off his seat and held him for an instant balanced in the air.

"Turn her down-stream," the midshipman ordered in a hoarse voice, as he flung the struggling man into the water clear of the rocking boat.

Maria by a well-timed stroke had instantly spun the canoe about, and all four bent desperately to their paddles. Phil saw the broad-brimmed sombrero of their enemy floating on the surface and a fear instantly filled his thoughts that Salas might not swim. The next second he was reassured; the head of the

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native covered with thick black hair could be plainly seen swimming toward the far shore; the menacing presence of the crocodile had deterred him from attempting to reach the land but a few strokes away. Every second the lad expected to hear a loud call for help from the outraged officer. Phil, over his shoulder, measured the distance yet to be gained by the struggling native. Why had he not cried out a warning to his men? Surely they were within hearing; the trail over which they had gone must be but a short distance from the river.

Under the straining muscles of the midshipmen, helped by the swiftness of the current, the canoe sped toward the grassy slope where their horses were waiting. A bend in the river, and the swimmer disappeared from sight.

"Why hasn't he given the alarm?" Phil demanded nervously. "What does it mean?"

"He will as soon as he reaches shore," Maria gasped breathlessly. "The monkeys when they fall in the water always scream, so Salas knows better than to signal to all the crocodiles within hearing."

Little Juan, try as he would, could not

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keep up with the furious pace set him by his companions, and he lay quietly balancing himself in the boat and gazing about him with frightened eyes.

The skiff was run full speed against the steep bank of the river, and the midshipmen clutched eagerly the loose earth until Maria and her brother had gained the shore. Then to their expectant ears there came a loud halloo! from up the river.

"There's no time to be lost," Phil urged excitedly as he darted ahead to where their horses had been tied. A sickening fear took possession of him until he had climbed to the top of the slope.

"They're here!" he cried joyfully, as he saw the five horses grazing contentedly.

The midshipmen lifted Maria and her brother upon the backs of their horses, cutting loose the hempen lariats with which they had been tethered.

"Lead the way, señorita," he cried hurriedly; "we must not spare ourselves."

For one second Phil lingered. The fifth horse, if he left it there, would afford the means of catching other horses to pursue

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them; for he knew that a single outlaw would not dare attempt to follow. With a few swift strokes of his knife he severed the bridle and then with his open hand struck the restless animal across the flanks. As he swung himself into his saddle he saw it plunge eagerly away into the dense jungle, happy to be again free of its domestic yoke.

As the lad dashed ahead after his companions, he heard the low moaning note of the concha (a shell bugle), a signal of warning used by the ladrones of the mountains. The sound was insidious. It seemed to come from a long way off. Yet Phil knew the operator could not be a mile away. The low tones were known to travel many miles, even farther than the high notes of a bugle. To those whose ears had not been trained to listen to the warning note, the sound might be mistaken for the coo of a wood pigeon. The lad's heart leaped as he foresaw that the two men who had gone to bring the missing canoe were between them and the only avenue of escape and their trained ears had already heard the warning sound. If they had started back in the boat when they

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heard the warning, they would remain concealed until the fugitives had drawn within close range and then would open fire upon them. Even though the persons of the party might escape the hastily aimed shots, the great bulk of a horse could never escape and the crippling of one animal would mean at the least their recapture, and probably death to all four.

With the energy of despair he drove his horse forward to join those in the lead. Breathlessly, trembling with his terrible anxiety, he reached Maria's side.

"Do you know of any other road?" he gasped. "There!" he exclaimed hopelessly, as a low coo came from the direction of the bungalow, "they have answered."

"I know of a road," the girl returned breathlessly, "but it is across the river, and is very narrow and uneven."

Phil gazed frantically at the swift current as it appeared intermittently through vistas in the trees while they sped along. Once across undiscovered they would be safe.

"But Juan, he cannot swim; he will be afraid," he cried hoarsely.

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"Never fear for him. It was necessary Colonel Salas should think so in order to persuade him to sit in front of you. He fell into my trap very obligingly," she returned, a half smile curving the corners of her mouth.

"The river then is our only chance," Phil declared decidedly. "It will be death for us all to attempt to pass the two armed outlaws."

"These horses are all good swimmers," Maria answered hurriedly. "Just hold on to the saddle and give them their heads. I know where we can land, so follow me. Look out for Juan," she ended in sisterly fear.

As Maria, followed by the midshipmen and Juan, forced her horse to enter the forbidding river, a fusillade of rifle-shots sounded from a point in the river some thousand yards above them, and the smack of bullets struck the water close to the horses' forefeet. A new danger now confronted the fugitives. Those above them had discovered their intention to cross the river. Fortunately as yet they were beyond the effective range of rifles, but if the

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two men at the ranch should discover the move they were making to put the river between them and their enemies, they could quickly cross in their canoe and locate themselves in the path of escape.

The horses drew back at first, erecting their ears and neighing timidly, doubtless scenting the huge crocodiles hidden in the rank growth upon the banks.

Phil heaved a relieved sigh as he saw Maria's horse emerge from the water on the far side, and scramble up the steep bank, the dripping girl clutching securely the saddle.

Little Juan behaved like a veteran, guiding his horse with a gentle hand across the current until the animal's feet took the bottom on the other side and when the horse's back emerged, he was sitting again securely in the saddle.

Just as Phil, the last to reach the shore, gained the steep ascent, a sharp crack of a rifle, followed by a loud smack as the bullet dug itself into the muddy soil, announced that those at the ranch had also discovered their presence. As Phil drew himself into the saddle shaking free his reins, a single

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swift glance down the river showed him the two natives running toward the palm grove where the canoe was tied. A few swift strokes and they would again bar the way.

"Come, Syd, we must ride ahead," Phil cried in a fever of dread, as he dashed by Maria and her brother. "Never mind what happens, señorita, you ride on as fast as you can go," he continued earnestly as Sydney spurred ahead to join him. "We've got to turn those fellows back," he explained breathlessly. "If they succeed in getting across they will be able to stop us completely."

As the midshipmen galloped madly down the rough trail toward a clearing in the trees from which they could get a clear view of their enemy, both drew their revolvers and held them in readiness.

"Look out for your horse, Syd," Phil continued; "he'll probably balk when we fire and to be unseated now would mean the end."

As the two horsemen came into view of the boat the two natives, half-way across the river, suddenly dropped their paddles. Two flashes of flame and a light, filmy smoke told

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that their bullets had been sent speeding in the midshipmen's direction. But fortunately the rocking canoe had spoiled their aim. The missiles sang harmlessly above the lads' heads.

On a mad gallop the two midshipmen rushed out upon the clearing, revolvers in hand. As if on drill, the two horses were drawn back upon their haunches and the Americans' weapons spoke furiously—shot after shot struck about the panic-stricken natives. They first attempted to paddle away, but the close hiss of the bullets became more than their waning courage could stand. Forgetting their rifles in their mad fear, they jumped overboard and dived below the surface of the water, while the empty canoe, in the grasp of the current, went sailing swiftly down-stream, forever beyond their reach.

With wild exultation the midshipmen turned and raced after their fleeing friends.

Darkness overtook them long before they could again recross the river and take the wide trail on which it was possible to ride with greater speed.

It was after midnight before the great house

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of Señor Rodriguez loomed up ahead, and after they had been stopped a number of times by the vigilant sentries they gained the hospitable roof.

After a hearty supper, which Maria insisted upon their eating, Phil declared his wish to return to Palilo.

"But your boat has not returned," Maria insisted. "You must sleep here to-night, then you can return in the morning."

Phil knew that O'Neil would not return until he had reached a depth of water in the river too shallow for the gunboat to pass. How far would he have to go? Maybe to the cañon beneath the insurgent stronghold. In that case he could scarcely expect them before morning. A slight uneasiness filled his thoughts, but he tried to put it aside, for O'Neil's ready resourcefulness could get them out of almost any difficulty.

"It is important, señorita," Phil declared firmly, "that I should return to-night. I will leave a message for my men to follow down on their return. May I have a boat or a couple of horses?" he asked.

Maria spoke a few words to an attendant.

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"Lopez will guide you," she answered. "I am sorry you will not stay, but you, of course, know best."

Señor Rodriguez, after he had been told of the miraculous escape of the explorers, shook the lads warmly by the hand, and thanked them for taking care of his two children.

"It was the other way around," Sydney cried in admiration. "Your daughter really saved us and herself, too. If it had not been for her we should have blundered into a fight with the ladrones and been killed for our pains."

The old man shook his head thoughtfully.

"Salas, eh? So he is with Espinosa. The two blackest rogues we have in the islands. You are lucky to be free of them."

"How many men have you guarding your plantation?" Phil inquired, his mind bent upon the possibility of an attack.

"I have five hundred men, but only three hundred rifles," Rodriguez replied. "Captain Blynn will send sufficient guns to arm all the men by to-morrow. I do not fear an attack until after Espinosa is more recovered. My spies report that he is still suffering from his

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wound. I suppose I must expect an attack eventually," he added sadly, gazing lovingly at his daughter and little son.

Within the hour, Lopez appeared and reported all was ready for the trip to Palilo.

"If you want more men," Phil suggested, "I can speak to Major Marble, the adjutant-general. But I, myself, hope soon to be anchored off your house in the 'Mindinao.'"

Lopez's old eyes opened wide. "A gunboat has not been for many years up this river," he said gravely. "The Spaniards built the bridge after the bloody fight at Matiginao over thirty years ago. It is said that many rocks were placed in the channel by the natives at that time, and after the Spaniards found the river was blocked for their gunboats they built that bridge to endure. It is all of stone and iron. A steam-launch can barely pass through the archway."

Phil's heart sank. The channel blocked with rock! If this was true only a careful survey could assure safety for the gunboat. The lead might easily miss the shallow places while the gunboat would discover the obstruction for the first time with its frail bottom.

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The lad shook hands with the dignified old man. They regarded him almost with reverence. Had they not seen him stand bravely before a score of his countrymen, who he knew would like nothing better than to murder him, and tell them boldly that he was for the right even if to be so would cause him to be called a traitor! Now he had declared for the American cause and almost every influential native's hand was against him.

Maria went with them to where the grooms held their horses.

"Señorita, we can never thank you enough," Phil declared gladly. "You are forever putting us in your debt."

"Ah, you have forgotten the night you saved Colonel Martinez," she said softly, and Phil imagined in the moonlight that her eyes shone brighter.

"By Jove, Phil!" Sydney exclaimed eagerly a moment later, after they and Lopez had swung themselves into their saddles and were trotting down the broad roadway, "I didn't believe it was in any girl to have such grit, least of all one of her race. How on earth did you come to think of such a trick

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as you played on that dapper little colonel?"

Phil smiled deliciously.

"That was planned telepathically between the señorita and me," he replied. "She purposely sat in front of Salas and I was placed behind him; reason one. She knew that I knew if Salas remained in that canoe we would all be made prisoners, and as Espinosa would be our jailer—well! The crocodile was sent by a kind Providence, but if not one way it would have been another. The idea occurred to me and I firmly believe that she divined what I was about to do, for did you see her spin the canoe about so as to get out of the colonel's reach when he was sent floundering in the water? She first induced him against his caution and better judgment to trust himself alone with us in one canoe."

"But why didn't he disarm us?" Sydney questioned perplexedly.

"I dare say he wonders why he didn't too, by now," Phil laughed. "Maria threw him quite off the scent, apparently. These brown fellows are very keen on dramatic scenes, and he doubtless thought it would be a fine situa-

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tion to spring the fact that we were prisoners when we had arrived in Espinosa's presence."

The guide Lopez rode silently at their side. The lads were too much occupied to give him more than a passing thought until the road emerged from the woods of the valley and wound gradually around a hill which was half-way between Rodriguez's ranch and Palilo. Their conversation had flagged; for the first time they realized that they needed sleep. After their hard ride they felt tired and stiff. By mutual consent they stopped on the crest of the hill. Phil took out his watch and held it up to the moon's rays.

"Two o'clock!" he exclaimed. "Not much sleep for us to-night." Then a look in Lopez's face caused him alarm. He saw the native, eyes intent on the horizon from which they had come and his hands pressing forward his ears, apparently trying to intercept a sound which he had either heard or imagined.

Phil was about to ask an eager question but before he could speak he was answered by a distant rumble from the direction of the ranch. Again and again the slight sound trembled on the still night. Like statues silhouetted

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against the sky, for a second or more the three men sat transfixed with apprehension. Then as one man they whirled their horses about and galloped madly back over the road in the direction from which they had come. That far-distant sound could have but one interpretation;—the Rodriguez ranch was being attacked, and they might be needed.

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CHAPTER XV

A NIGHT OF ALARM

AFTER the midshipmen had ridden away Maria returned to the large living-room to bid her father good-night. A new pleasure had come into her life, and what was more natural than that she should wish to share it with him? These frank, young Americans had proved themselves to be of a quality which she had not thought existed outside of the story-books of her childhood. She believed that in their friendship her father's difficulties would melt away. Juan Rodriguez, interested as he had always been in the political trials of his country together with the management of his vast estates, from which he had reaped great riches, like most Filipinos of the upper class, had treated his only daughter more as a heaven-sent treasure rather than as a daughter to confide in and in whom to seek womanly sympathy in his perplexities. Her principal care had been for her brother, Juan, the pride

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of the old man's life. Upon this seven-year-old boy the greater part of his affection was centred. Maria was not at all sleepy, and, seeing a light in her father's bedroom, she slipped in quietly to pour out her heart to the stern but kindly parent.

On the threshold she stopped in startled amazement. Her slippered feet had made no sound and the door as she pushed it open caused him to glance up in annoyed surprise. She saw her father on his knees in the corner before several heavy iron-bound chests, and their opened covers displayed to her anxious eyes a great wealth of gold and silver coins. More money than her young imagination had ever dreamed of.

As Rodriguez's eyes encountered the startled look in his daughter's face, an expression of stern annoyance came into his own as he snapped the huge lids shut and rose to his feet.

"Why do you keep all that money here?" she asked anxiously.

Her father looked worried at the question.

"All the money I have is in those chests, daughter," he answered in a low voice. "It has

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been buried, but when Garcia deserted me, Lopez and I dug it up and brought it in here. I fear these native banks, and if I should be robbed by the insurgents I would leave you and Juan penniless. My lands are valuable, but these," pointing to the chests, "contain the most of my wealth. My ambition is to take my children abroad, away from this turmoil and strife where they can see the world and be educated in a way befitting the blood in their veins."

Maria put her arms about the old man's neck and kissed him fondly. "Father," she began, her eyes smiling with happiness, "I came in to speak to you of the two young men who have just left us. Tell them of your troubles and I know they will be able to solve the difficulty."

Rodriguez smiled sadly.

"Your knights, child, I see have already been endowed with magic powers," he answered lovingly, patting her smooth black hair, "but we have a cruel and unscrupulous enemy against us, and I am sure by now he knows of the existence of this treasure. Garcia and I were the only ones who knew where it was buried,

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and I trusted him as a brother but he has deserted and betrayed me. Lopez is from the people, but his honesty and loyalty are beyond doubt. Captain Blynn knows that this money is here and has promised to send a company of soldiers to take it to safety in the government vaults at Palilo. I had hoped he would be here before now," he ended in a worried tone.

"Why bury it?" Maria exclaimed. "Our American friends would gladly take it on the gunboat, where it will be perfectly safe."

Rodriguez's face lighted up.

"I will ask them to-morrow," she added as she kissed her father in parting, "and now don't lose any sleep over your troublesome gold." She turned, a happy smile on her face, and glided noiselessly to the door, to enter her own room; she stopped and the smile froze on her face and the fear within her made her faint; she clutched reeling at the door and steadied herself. The face of a man had been pressed against the dark glass of the window in her room, and she knew instantly that he had seen through the opened door the three coveted chests of treasure. She passed her

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hands across her face in horror, hoping that it was but a trick of the imagination, conjured up by her anxiety. But no, the face had been too vividly distinct. As she had entered the darkness of her room, for an instant the light from her father's lamp had been reflected on the intruder's face, and in that terrible moment she had recognized her father's former confidant, but now his enemy, Garcia. She stood panic-stricken, at a loss how to act. To give the alarm might insure her father's death. Perhaps the enemy had made their way within and were at that very moment concealed in the great vacant rooms, lying hidden in the darkness waiting until the household were all asleep, and then murder and robbery would be their aim. If she told her father now, she knew that he would fearlessly and at once give the alarm and call for his armed men to protect him. Then a thought made the blood freeze in her veins, as her active mind sought for the means Garcia had employed to pass her father's sentries. There could be but one solution. Garcia had sowed dissension among her father's retainers. How many of his men could now

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be trusted? While she stood in terrified silence, a loud knock on the outside door caused her young body to tremble in mortal terror. What could it mean? Who would come at this hour in the morning? She saw her father make ready to answer, for the servants all slept in a house adjoining.

"I'll open it," she cried, trying to disguise the tremble in her voice, and with shaking limbs she crept down the stairs. Holding her breath, she listened. Then she drew back the bolts in trembling haste and threw wide the door.

O'Neil and his tired companions, the boat's crew, stood in open-eyed wonder as this wild-eyed but now joyous girl dragged them inside and again barred the door.

"What's the trouble, señorita?" O'Neil asked in calm surprise.

She put her finger to her lips and led them into the dining-room, where the remnants of the midshipmen's supper still remained. The five men fell upon the food ravenously while Maria stood by, fear and hope in turns showing in her dark eyes.

She told them of the trip up the river and

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the escape from the ladrone leader, then of the valuable treasure in her father's room and the face she had seen at the window. After she had finished she watched O'Neil's face as if it were an oracle and she a petitioner before it. The boatswain's mate ate for several minutes in silence.

"Where are your men posted?" he asked suddenly.

"They are divided into four companies, one at each of the outposts," she answered.

"Does any one except your father and Colonel Martinez know of Garcia's treachery?" he asked.

"Yes, two, Lopez and Lukban," she replied, "and they are both away from the ranch. Lopez has just gone to Palilo with our friends."

"That's bad," the sailor exclaimed, a cloud on his otherwise expressionless face. "Then your men believe that Garcia is still their friend? He has, of course, accomplices among them and his object surely must be the treasure. He has discovered that it has been dug up, and now knows it is in your father's room. I do not believe there is any immediate

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danger unless at the same time the insurgents are to make an attack in force."

The girl listened eagerly, nodding her head in agreement with the wise words of this cool and calm American. O'Neil's companions, understanding no Spanish, had finished their meal and were dozing contentedly in their chairs.

"Have you a servant you can trust?" O'Neil asked after a moment's thought.

"My maid, Inez," she answered.

"All right; give her a revolver and tell her to go to each company and quietly wake the men and tell them to get ready immediately to repel an attack. If she is in danger of being captured by a lurking enemy tell her to use the revolver. I'll leave two men with you and your father, while I'll take two to try to bag this Garcia."

Maria listened eagerly, hope rising as the sailor clearly outlined his plan of action. She was sure Inez could be depended upon. Quietly she flew up the stairs. As she passed her father's room she saw that he had retired, but had left the light burning for her. She stopped a second, listening to his easy breath-

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ing. He was asleep. Then she went through her own room, a chill passing through her as her eyes turned in fear toward the window.

She took hold of Inez's arm and shook her into wakefulness. The old woman, who had nursed Maria as a baby, sat up rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"Keep quiet," Maria whispered in a commanding voice. "We are all in danger of being murdered. I want you to take this revolver and go to each outpost, tell the officer on guard that it is Señor Rodriguez's order to form his men to repel an attack at once. If you fail fire the revolver as a signal to us."

The old woman rose to her feet trembling violently. She counted her beads, murmuring her prayers, but there was never a word of fear or hesitancy.

"Good, Inez," Maria whispered, kissing the old wrinkled face. The girl saw it was set determinedly, yet a great and unknown terror looked out of her appealing eyes. But the girl knew that she would be the safest messenger. No one else could be depended upon like Inez, and she would

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sacrifice her old life willingly to help her beloved master.

When Maria again entered the dining-room O'Neil had turned out the lamp and was ready to carry out his daring plan.

"Two of my men will remain here with you, señorita," he told Maria as she held open the door. "We'll soon bag this fellow Garcia, if he's still hanging about."

O'Neil, followed cautiously by his two men, walked slowly about the great house. As noiselessly as Indians they crept within its shadow, straining their eyes toward the portico and covered porches above their heads. There still remained the light in the room above where the girl and her two protectors were doubtless now guarding her father and his treasure. While O'Neil stood listening eagerly, a shadow crossed the windows; it moved slowly inch by inch. The house was silent. Off to his left O'Neil could hear a babble of excited voices and the rattle of military accoutrements. Inez's warning had been given and the native soldiers were hastening to their stations to repel an enemy. The shadow slowly crossed and disappeared and then the

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light was suddenly extinguished. O'Neil was about to seek further when a noise from above arrested his attention. He recognized at once that a sash was being opened slowly. Then as he watched a dark figure appeared and dropped noiselessly to the porch roof a few feet below the window. Quietly it lowered itself to the edge of the roof and then with the agility of an acrobat or a sailor climbed down the post near which the boatswain's mate and his men were standing. The next moment two powerful arms enfolded it and a cry of fear was promptly stifled.

Then from the dark shadow of the woods to the northward came a volley of musketry, followed by the war-cry of the bolo-man.

Hastily binding their prisoner with their neckerchiefs, the sailors flung him on to the porch and rushed to join the defenders scarcely four hundred yards away. Rodriguez had carefully laid out his plan of defense, and before the attacking enemy could come to a hand to hand fight, over three hundred yards of cleared land must be traversed. As O'Neil and his men reached the trenches where the native soldiers were excitedly firing blindly

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into the night, he could see a bobbing line of men rapidly running across this open space, firing as they advanced. Hastily surveying his surroundings, he saw that on one flank was the river defended by a company of men and on the flank away from the river was still another company. The excited native officers were shouting orders to their men, the purport of which O'Neil could but guess. The bobbing figures seemed in vast numbers and they advanced rapidly in spite of the fire from the trenches. Suddenly the company from the river bank left its post and came at double time to the middle of the line of defense. O'Neil and his men had seized a rifle each from lifeless hands and were elbow to elbow—vociferously haranguing the men, cautioning them to aim at the constantly moving enemy. Before they could realize its significance, a line of men arose suddenly from the short grass, only a few score of yards in front of the trenches, to which point they had crawled unobserved, while the defenders had been firing at the visible enemy. The next second this avalanche of naked humanity had cleared the intervening yards and were hacking at the

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surprised defenders with their sharp bolos. Their friends in their rear still kept up a brisk fire and many of the bolo-men suffered by it. O'Neil suddenly found himself occupied by three fanatics bent upon his destruction, while his companions near him were in as perilous a position. Throwing away his empty rifle he drew his revolver and fired unerringly at the nearest native. Then seizing the fallen man's bolo he rushed upon his other two assailants. So fierce had been the onslaught of the bolo-men that they had surged into and even beyond the rifle-pits, leaving a trail of destruction in their path.

The bolo-men, now at close quarters with those in the trenches, made good use of their keen-bladed knives, but Rodriguez's men, familiar with the method of attack of these fanatics, appeared to flee, and then turning shot their would-be pursuers down by the score. O'Neil and his companions were in these few exciting minutes many times in peril of their lives but soon the last of the attacking horde lay gasping on the grass behind the intrenchment and the sailors and their dusky allies were again in comparative security awaiting grimly

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the final attack of the bobbing figures some hundreds of yards in their front, from whose direction a hail of bullets whistled incessantly. O'Neil felt himself all over hardly believing that he had escaped unscathed. The sailor during his many years of service had never seen a fight more desperate. He had frequently heard of the insurgent method of employing bolo-men; using their riflemen as a screen, the practically unarmed horde, who believed that their "Anting-Anting" charms rendered them invulnerable, crawling snake-like, unobserved beyond their firing line until they reached the rifle-pits of their enemy. Now he felt sure the attack on the ranch would fail. Rodriguez's natives had successfully weathered the bolo rush, which they had learned to fear most. He did not know the numbers of the attackers, but if they could be held off until morning the soldiers who had been promised from Palilo to guard Rodriguez's treasure would surely be there to turn the tide in their favor. By the fire from the trenches surrounding the ranch house on all sides except that covered by the river, beyond which was an impenetrable swamp, he knew that

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their line had not been broken. With a lighter heart he counseled the natives near him to be careful of their ammunition, setting them an example by firing deliberately only when a target native exposed himself in the clearing in front of them. So much occupied were those in the trenches that they failed to see several great canoes land near the pier, and their occupants in single file noiselessly steal toward the ranch house.

Again and again the insurgents made their onslaught, but each time were received unflinchingly and driven back in confusion across the cleared ground, many being left dead or dying on the field.

A disheveled, terrified figure came running from the house toward the trenches; it glanced about wildly seeking some one and then threw itself at O'Neil's feet, clasping his legs tightly, almost upsetting him among the stiffening bodies of the dead on the floor of the trench. In the dim light he recognized the woman Inez who had courageously spread the alarm among the native soldiers and her incoherent words filled the sailor's heart with dire forebodings.

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"Oh, señor, save my master," she cried; "he is in mortal danger."

O'Neil bent down and unclasped the woman's hands and lifted her to her feet, but her body crumpled and the American saw with a sob of horror that Inez had done her last service to the Rodriguez family; a bolo cut on her old body had claimed her among the victims slain in this unnecessary war.

The boatswain's mate laid the woman's body aside and with a score of willing men started on a run for the house. Half-way there they stopped precipitously, hardly believing their eyes, a great fear in their hearts, for from the river there came a noiseless band of men, dim shadows under the gloom of the trees. O'Neil counted them as their silhouettes crossed a vista in the trees, and his hopes died within him. Here was a new enemy, striking from the rear. The men in the trenches could not leave their positions; to do so would allow many hundreds of the insurgents to sweep the ranch.

"Forward!" he cried; "we must reach the ranch house first."

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He saw that this was their only hope to save the inmates.

Then a cry of joy leaped from his lips as tongues of flame leaped from the vicinity of the house, directed upon the advancing men from the river. He heard an order given sharply in the English tongue and a volley shattered the darkness asunder.

"American soldiers!" he cried jubilantly.

O'Neil and his men had meanwhile circled away from the river in hopes of making a rush for an entrance; now with sudden consternation O'Neil saw that the appearance of the soldiers from the river would place him in the line of retreat of those now surrounding the ranch house. Selecting the protection of a tree trunk he called upon his men to do likewise. He heard the order "Charge" given in the silvery peals of a bugle and the next moment the terrified natives were fleeing directly toward him, the hindmost slashing with their bolos those in front of them in their mad haste to seek safety. Then the drumming of hoof-beats was heard and three horsemen appeared suddenly from the night,

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emptying their revolvers as they came into the fleeing savages.

A woman's scream pierced the night and the figure of a man silently dropped from the roof and disappeared in the darkness.

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CHAPTER XVI

A FILIPINO MARTYR

PHIL and Sydney were hard pushed to keep up with the native as he spurred his horse forward over the dark road.

"The ranch is being attacked!" Lopez cried in a voice of fear. "My poor master will surely be killed!"

Phil's thoughts were only for the frail girl whom he had begun to look upon as his own especial charge. He knew the cruelty of the Filipinos when once their anger was aroused and he believed that her part in Espinosa's betrayal must now be known to that treacherous leader. Probably Colonel Salas himself formed a part of the attacking force, and the lad thought fearfully of the vengeance he would take upon the helpless girl if she fell into his hands. As they approached the ranch, the volume of fire increased alarmingly.

"They are in force!" Phil exclaimed, his

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heart sinking within him as he urged his tired mount forward.

The ranch with its surrounding orchard of fruit trees now lay just below them and the white road winding down the hill glistened in the dim moonlight. Tongues of flame darted here and there from the shadows of trees and shrub, even close to the house itself, while further in the background toward the river a line of flame resembling fireflies on a summer evening told him the soldiers of Rodriguez were stubbornly resisting the main attack from their solidly built trenches. As they plunged madly down the hill road, his alert eyes tried to disentangle the situation. He saw many moving figures flitting through the trees, the moonlight glinting on their bright bladed bolos, while toward the river a long line of flashing rifles told of a rescue party approaching, from whom the flitting figures were fleeing.

Three white figures appeared suddenly from behind a tree close to the retreating bolomen and the lad's heart gave a great leap of joy as he recognized even in the dim light the stalwart figure of O'Neil.

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Then as he charged forward with his companions close beside him, Maria's cry made his heart sink and at the same instant he saw the figure of a man emerge from the house and dart away after the retreating bolomen.

"Where are we needed?" a familiar voice shouted from the company which had now halted at the house, and the anxious lads, after firing their revolvers in vain at the fleeing figure, were shaking Captain Blynn's hand.

"In the trenches, sir," O'Neil volunteered eagerly. "They are hard pushed, sir."

Captain Blynn gave a hurried order and his company of American soldiers rushed eagerly toward the thick of the firing, followed by O'Neil and his men. All were eager to again try conclusions with the elusive foe.

Phil and Sydney followed the anxious Lopez to the house. As they entered the hall they were horrified to find everything in confusion. The furniture was wrecked in many places, and there were blood-stains on floor and wall, showing there had been a terrible struggle. A light was burning dimly in an

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alcove. In the corner lay the white form of an American sailor mutilated and dead. Further up the stairs they saw the other poor sailor breathing his last. Clearing the body with a bound the lads gazed with sinking heart upon the dead face of Señor Rodriguez, lying on the floor of his bedroom, while all about him was confusion and ruin.

"Where is the girl?" Sydney asked in a faint, fearful voice.

"Señorita!" Phil called hopelessly.

A faint sob came to their ears from an inner room. Rushing in they found the girl on the floor, her hands and feet securely bound. About her mouth a gag had been placed, but it had fallen, leaving the mouth free.

They quickly released her and placed her tenderly on the bed.

"She managed to get off the gag and scream," Phil whispered with admiration, "before she fainted. Bring that light, Syd, she may be hurt."

The light was soon brought, and the lads were relieved to find that she was unharmed.

Lopez meanwhile had stayed at the bedside

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of his dead master, moaning piteously. The noise caught the girl's ear as she awaked from her stupor under the administration of the midshipmen.

"It was Espinosa himself," she exclaimed in an anguish of sorrow. "They forced the door and killed the brave sailors. My father defended himself but he is no match for five men. Espinosa struck him down from behind. I ran to guard little Juan, but they caught me and bound me."

"The money is gone too," groaned Lopez. This to him seemed as great a sorrow as the death of his master.

"They lowered it out the window," Maria said. She entered her father's room, walking unsteadily between the two midshipmen, and knelt in prayer before her father's couch.

Phil's eyes fell before those of the girl as she arose dry-eyed and calm. He saw the anguish in her face, however, and vowed that he would lighten her task wherever it lay in his power.

"Is Juan safe?" Lopez asked suddenly, his mind at last grasping the horrible calamity which had fallen on his master's house and

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realizing that his first duty was with the living.

The girl nodded.

"Inez brought the alarm that the house was surrounded. She hid the boy and herself. Espinosa searched for him and his intention was to carry us both away as his prisoners." Then a sudden fear came into her voice and her eyes flashed with excited terror. "He said that Colonel Martinez had been killed. Is it so?"

The lads shook their heads.

"We have no news, Maria," Phil said kindly. "No, it cannot be so. It was but prompted by this cruel man to taunt you."

She sighed hopefully.

"If he had known of this attack and was alive he would have prevented it," she exclaimed suddenly, her hope turning to dejection.

While they were talking the fusillade slowly diminished and soon ceased altogether and in a short time Captain Blynn's voice was heard in the hall below.

In the large living-room the army and navy men sat, until the daylight sifted in

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through the shell windows, talking of the perplexing situation, while Maria was made to go to bed and sleep. The doctor who accompanied the captain regarded her with eyes of grave concern.

"She must not be overexcited. She is outwardly calm but her heart acts queerly. It may snap at any moment," he had told the lads.

"I have received a long letter from your friend, Colonel Martinez," the captain exclaimed to the midshipmen after disposing of a steaming cup of coffee. "He said he would willingly surrender to General Wilson if the price on his head were removed, and he sent me papers and documents which I have already sent to the governor-general in Manila which prove Martinez's innocence of certain crimes committed in Luzon and implicate a Filipino now high in the good graces of the government."

Phil thoughtfully sent Lopez to Maria to tell her of Captain Blynn's news and then gave Captain Blynn the story of the recent tragedy on the floor above.

"Poor Rodriguez," the captain murmured.

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"If he had taken the other side he would now be alive. The money," he added, his face troubled—"I am too late. I promised him I would come, but I was delayed by important matters with the general."

"A search at once," Phil exclaimed rising hastily from his chair; "they can't have gone far with those heavy chests."

Lopez smiled grimly.

"Señor, it would be impossible to follow them. By now the treasure is either carefully hidden or else in a banka hurrying up the river to Espinosa's stronghold. We must capture Espinosa; where he is the money will be also."

"Quite right, Lopez," Captain Blynn agreed. "It's not pleasant to hike in this country at night either, young man," he added to Phil, whose sudden show of excitement in the prospect of another fight had died down; "every trail is trapped, and I don't relish a green bamboo spear through me even for all old Rodriguez's money. Espinosa undoubtedly has planned this attack carefully and in the darkness we would simply be wasting our time and be losing sleep.

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"Some of our friend Espinosa's plotting, in the light of this affair, is now quite plain. Rodriguez was in his way, and so is Martinez, but I don't exactly see why; and this attack was made easy through his winning of Garcia, the trusted friend of Rodriguez. But how did he learn of this money?"

"Why," Phil exclaimed, a scowl on his face, "Lopez tells me that Garcia alone knew of its existence and coveted it, and readily persuaded Espinosa to help him obtain it and share it. With that amount of money they can make this war very difficult for us or they can escape with their booty to Hongkong."

"Well," said the captain yawning outright, "I must get some sleep. The bridge is clear; I'll wait here until you bring up the gunboat. The general is coming himself to look over the ground. We've had reports that the rebel army is massing at Matiginao, where supplies for a year have been collected.

"We're going to have the biggest fight in the history of the war," he added in a sleepy voice as he lay full length on the wicker lounge. "By the way, old man Tillotson promises all kinds of rewards to any one who

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will rescue his son. He's coming down himself—sailed from Manila the day after he got the news."

Although the midshipmen and their men would have liked nothing better than to follow Captain Blynn's example for a few hours' nap, they felt that the startling news that the entire rebel army was collecting upon Matiginao made it imperative for them to leave the situation at the Rodriguez ranch in the hands of Captain Blynn and return to their gunboat. So far their work had not been crowned with success. True, they had exposed a traitor, but in doing so the American soldiers had acquired a new and sagacious enemy in Espinosa. The remaining members of the Katipunan society had taken fright, and had fled before the vengeance of Captain Blynn whom they all hated and feared. Rodriguez had been killed, and enough gold to continue the war indefinitely had been taken almost before their eyes, and they had been powerless to prevent it. This was not a pleasant retrospective dream in which to indulge as they watched in silence the even breathing of the complacent army man.

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"We seem so powerless against them," Sydney complained. "Our enemies are everywhere. One moment the natives about us seem friendly, and the next they are sticking us in the back with knives. When we start on an expedition the enemy know just how many men we have and where we are going, so there can be no surprise, while they always take us unawares."

"But now, it's different since Espinosa and the Katipunans have been forced to leave Palilo," Phil exclaimed. "In the last few days Captain Blynn says our soldiers in the provinces have surprised several bands of insurgents. So you see they have ceased to be kept posted by spies at headquarters.

"Espinosa is collecting all his men in Matiginao with the idea of safety and a hope of being able to capture Palilo before the two extra regiments arrive, but General Wilson will checkmate him by withdrawing half his men to surround him in his mountain stronghold. Now we have some chance; before, they simply knew when we were coming, and if they couldn't meet us with three times our number they kept out of the way. But

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come," he added suddenly jumping to his feet, "we are wasting time."

The Americans returned down the river in their cutter, this time the midshipmen taking turns at the oars, and it was nearly eight o'clock before they stood once more on the deck of the "Mindinao." The bodies of the dead sailors were sent at once to the army hospital for burial.

"Major Marble has been here twice to see you, sir," the quartermaster informed Phil; "he said he'd return again in an hour."

"Breakfast first," Phil shouted to the Chinese steward, who came aft, smiling blandly at the return of his officers, steaming coffee in hand.

While they were still at table Major Marble arrived, and was told all the news of the river.

"The audacity of those beggars," he exclaimed, "attacking in force within ten miles of headquarters. It's a shame, the few men we are allowed to cover this entire country. The general sees now that what is needed is concentration, but if we withdraw our entire garrisons from the towns it will mean that

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the innocent people there who have befriended us will suffer."

"I suppose you are right, major," Phil said thoughtfully, "but in war it seems to me that one can't stop to consider the feelings of innocent people where the success of the cause is concerned. Espinosa has twice as many troops as the general, and they are fighting on their home soil. They know every footpath. Some are not armed with a rifle but are far more dangerous to us with their bolos and fanatical bravery. We did not see his stronghold, I am glad to say," he smiled grimly at the words, "but we know that one thousand men held it successfully against five times that number of Spaniards a generation ago. From what I have seen I say concentrate every available man and crush this fellow Espinosa before he gets any stronger."

Major Marble nodded his head in agreement with the views of the young navy man.

"If we could always do what our military training dictates," he answered sadly, "this war might not have begun."

"I shall go up the river in an hour," Phil

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announced, "and if the general wishes I shall be honored to have him on board."

"The general is waiting anxiously to know that," the major replied promptly; "that was my mission here, but your exploits so interested me I had nearly forgotten my mission."

Within the hour the "Mindinao," flying the blue flag with one white star at her main truck in honor of her distinguished passenger, General Wilson, cast off from the dock and steamed up the river.

"That was a fine piece of work," Phil exclaimed in admiration, as he examined the cleverly constructed drawbridge built within the twenty-four hours by the army engineers. Its width was just sufficient to admit the "Mindinao."

Phil stood on the bridge beside the man at the wheel, piloting the gunboat through the ever-changing shoals, while O'Neil in person heaved the lead in the chains, calling out the depth in feet.

After leaving the town the river ran through several miles of nipa swamp land, the home of the carnivorous land crab, the crocodile and the bandit Filipino. The

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gunboat continued cautiously, Phil keeping the sharp bow within the deep water, sometimes so close to the thickly wooded shore that he could have reached out and touched with his hand the overhanging trees.

Before noon the "Mindinao" had anchored off Rodriguez's ranch and the general and party were landed to view the scene of the recent fight. The shore was lined with curious and excited natives, those of Rodriguez's men, who had been spared from the fierce attack. To them the presence of the gunboat so far up the river was almost a miracle. They pointed knowingly at the big guns and clapped their hands in savage joy at the thought of what they could do against the enemy.

Captain Blynn had taken the situation in hand and had distributed the soldiers of his company to reinforce the native companies. A feeling of relief was now manifested by all. They were confident that no attack would be attempted while the gunboat's guns frowned menacingly out there in the river.

"That's worth a regiment," Captain Blynn exclaimed as he saluted the general and helped him from the "Mindinao's" cutter to

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the bamboo pier, pointing to the graceful white ship, standing sharply against the dark background of jungle grass and banana trees. As they walked toward the house Captain Blynn dropped behind and took Phil's arm confidingly.

"After you had gone my men found a native tied up in all sorts of sailor knots with silk neckerchiefs, just under Rodriguez's window. Señorita Rodriguez recognized him at once as a former friend of her father who she said had betrayed him. He was pretty well frightened and to save his skin, for he believes we are going to kill him, he has offered to show us the trail to Espinosa's stronghold."

Phil shook his head in mystery.

"I don't know how he got there, unless ——" He turned and called O'Neil from the boat. "O'Neil, do you know anything about a native securely bound with sailor neckerchiefs?"

"Sure, sir. It was the one that crawled out of the window," he explained hastily; "the young lady saw his face spying on her father. His name is Garcia."

"Do you know," the captain said know-

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ingly, "that he is the only prisoner captured? There wasn't a single wounded man in sight this morning. It isn't the custom of the country, you see."

Phil involuntarily shuddered. "How callous one becomes," he thought, "in war time. Think of maybe a hundred wounded men cruelly butchered by brother natives."

Before they reached the house the party was startled by a rifle-shot from behind them. Glancing about quickly they saw a large canoe manned by natives appear from behind the trees and paddle directly for the gunboat; a large white flag flew prominently from the bow of the boat. Phil and Captain Blynn walked quickly back and sent O'Neil and his cutter out to learn the meaning of the flag of truce. The general and the rest of the party halted and waited, eager to see what this strange move might mean.

The boat came quickly back and Phil took a letter from a native's hand scanning it with beating heart. "For the general," he said.

All watched the general break the seal and fumble with his glasses. It seemed ages be-

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fore he finished the few short lines and handed the letter to Captain Blynn.

"Lieutenant Tillotson is my prisoner. I will surrender him safely in exchange for the deserter Colonel Martinez. If you attack me I shall have him shot. ESPINOSA."

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CHAPTER XVII

A DARING PLAN

PHIL stood silently by, his mind occupied over the details of a daring plan.

The exchange proposed by Espinosa was out of the question, even if Colonel Martinez had surrendered, which he had not done up to the present time; and until his sins in Luzon were forgiven Phil knew that he preferred his liberty. But this threat against Tillotson's life worried Phil. Espinosa was sufficiently cruel to carry it out, he was sure.

Leaving the group of officers, who were still pondering over the contents of Espinosa's communication, Phil went in search of Maria. There were points in his plan which she could throw light upon.

He found her in the house, heavy-eyed with sorrow and loss of sleep, but she greeted him with a smile and waited patiently until the room was empty before signing him to speak,

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for she saw that he had something of importance to communicate.

"How much dependence can we put upon Garcia as a guide?" he asked eagerly. "I have a plan, and all depends upon whether he can be trusted to lead us against Espinosa, if not willingly, then under intimidation."

"Before they killed my father and carried away the treasure," the girl answered, a spark of excitement entering her dull eyes, "Espinosa and Salas got the information necessary for their work from Garcia, bound and helpless where your sailors had left him. They refused to liberate him and hoped he would be killed by the Americans. You can be sure," she added, "that he will take keen pleasure in running his enemies to earth."

"And now for my favor from you," the lad continued in a lower tone; "as Garcia will take Lopez's place as guide for the soldiers to the trail up the mountain, I want twenty-five of your men whom you would trust to the death, under the command of Lopez, to take O'Neil and me as prisoners to Espinosa's camp."

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The girl gave a low exclamation of surprised horror, regarding Phil fixedly, half believing the lad was out of his mind.

"I mean it," he exclaimed earnestly. "It's the only chance we have of saving Tillotson's life. Your men must pretend to have deserted after the death of their master," he dropped his voice as he saw the look of pain in Maria's eyes at the mention of her father's sad fate. "Lopez will claim to have taken us prisoners and then deserted to the insurgents. It's a good plan," he cried enthusiastically, "and is sure to be successful."

Maria paled at the mere thought of such rashness, but seeing Phil could not be moved from his avowed intention, she gave her consent grudgingly.

The general was not so easily convinced. His natural and inherent cautiousness could not be changed even under the combined persuasion of the midshipman and his staff officers, Major Marble and Captain Blynn, who were both enthusiastic over the conception of such a daring strategy.

"The very impertinence of it will make it successful," Major Marble exclaimed. "They

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will not believe that one could be so rash as to willingly place his life in danger."

"You'll have to stay with the gunboat," Phil explained to Sydney, who was visibly put out that he too could not be allowed to go. "I shall take only O'Neil. The general has ordered that all the soldiers who can be spared from the garrisons throughout the island be despatched to rendezvous here and will need the 'Mindinao' to carry troops and shell the stronghold from the river. If you find it possible take her through the cañon; there is a trail on the other side from the westward. If you are successful we shall have them between our two parties."

That evening Maria and her small brother followed their father's body to his grave in the family cemetery. The general himself read the solemn burial service and a company of American infantry fired three volleys over the grave of the murdered patriot.

General Wilson established his field headquarters in the house of mourning and before three o'clock of the next day the first of the detachments of soldiers arrived and went into camp on the river slope.

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"We shall have about one thousand rifles for the attack," Captain Blynn told the midshipmen, after Phil had unfolded to him and Major Marble the details of his plan to rescue Lieutenant Tillotson, "and by to-morrow afternoon they should all be assembled here. The general," he added, "is very much worked up over Espinosa's threat, and realizes that it is not an empty one, but he still refuses to allow you to take this terrible chance."

Within a short time Phil was summoned to the general's room.

"I cannot allow you to take this risk," he said kindly, a light of admiration in his eyes. "Why should two American lives be jeopardized to save one? And perhaps some will say that Lieutenant Tillotson does not deserve such a sacrifice at your hands."

"That makes me more anxious to take the risk," Phil urged. "We did not part friends, and I can't help feeling that our quarrel has had some part in his misfortune."

Under the confiding influence of the general's manner, Phil told of his affair with Tillotson, doing his best to make a good case for his one time enemy.

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The general shook his head thoughtfully.

"It is very hard for me to allow you to undertake such a rash adventure," he answered, putting his hand affectionately on the midshipman's shoulder, "but war is war, and if pluck will bring success, Tillotson's life will be saved. Tell me now," he added, seating himself and motioning Phil to a chair, "how far you have worked out the details of your plan, for every point must be covered; there must be no loophole for failure. Can you expect that each of your twenty-five men will keep the secret after they have mixed with the enemy?"

Phil outlined each step as he had thought it out during the last anxious twenty-four hours, while the general listened, his face grave and thoughtful.

They would start after nightfall, and by sending men ahead to announce their coming would be received by the insurgents with acclamation. They would spend the next day at the camp and Lopez would endeavor to keep his men from mixing with the enemy, and the next night the gunboat and as many troops as the general could muster would lay siege to the stronghold. The remainder Phil

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had not thought out. Chance alone must decide the outcome, but he hoped to save Lieutenant Tillotson's life and their own, and maybe by Lopez and his men commanding the top of the trail they could aid the American troops in their fight for the stronghold. When the attack was made he would use Lopez's men to prevent Espinosa from carrying out his threat against Tillotson's life. The gunboat must use its fire against the fortifications, but be careful to direct its shell to the left of the stronghold, for he hoped that his own men would be at the right near the trail leading down the precipice.

"There are a great many chances for failure," the general said thoughtfully as Phil finished, "but with your energy and perseverance I believe you will win." He shook the lad's hand warmly in parting.

"I wish I could go with you," Maria said sadly as Phil bade her good-bye; "but you can put your full trust in Lopez. It was he who betrayed the Katipunan society to me to save my father's life. How he got the information I do not know, but if his act were known his life would be forfeited."

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Without ceremony Phil and O'Neil, their hands tied securely with ropes made fast to their bodies and held in the hands of the make-believe deserting natives, filed along the narrow trail leading parallel to the fast flowing river. Two messengers had been sent ahead to notify the insurgent leader of the joyful tidings of the important captures. Their progress was rapid, and inside of three hours the house which had been the scene of Phil's and Maria's strategy was reached. There the party waited.

After what seemed an interminable time to the anxious prisoners, a challenge suddenly broke the stillness of the dismal woods and Phil's old enemy, Colonel Salas, stood before him. A great joy shone from his dark vengeful eyes as he beheld the bound prisoners.

"My chief will be delighted to receive such distinguished visitors," he laughed, kicking Phil viciously as he lay helpless upon the ground. "That is for your cleverness of yesterday," he snarled. "We'll see you are kindly treated. We shall give you all the refined initiations that we can think of to make

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your stay with us pleasant and then ——" He stopped with a significant gesture.

"O'Neil," Phil whispered after Colonel Salas had left him to join Lopez, who had assembled his men ready to advance, "I am afraid we are in for a pretty bad time of it. But if I ever get the opportunity I'll make that little brown piece of pomposity pay for that kick he gave me."

"Well, sir," O'Neil replied evasively, "I may have been in worse situations—no doubt I have—but this one seems rather more complicated. I think we'll have many kicks and worse to pay back before we can call our bodies our own and not footballs for these little brown brothers to score with."

After a rapid parley the party were again in motion. Phil and O'Neil were roughly seized by two natives and forced ahead up the trail. Two or three times Phil's foot slipped into yawning holes at either side of the trail, but each time he was dragged back to safety by the natives behind him.

"This whole place is trapped," O'Neil whispered, pointing to where his foot had uncovered the top of a square hole some six feet deep, the lantern carried by a man in front be-

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traying to view the green bamboo spears at the bottom.

Phil shivered as he gazed down on the pointed sticks as sharp as a needle, and poisoned, he knew, with a deadly vegetable sap that would kill within the hour.

"Be careful, Mr. Perry," O'Neil cautioned in a low, anxious voice. "These men know where the traps are, and will try to catch you if you make a misstep—but they might fail," he added with a shudder.

A halt was called suddenly as they moved through a densely wooded section of the level trail, while several of Colonel Salas' men moved cautiously ahead and appeared to work quietly in the jungle. After a few minutes they reappeared and signaled for the column to proceed.

"Spring traps," O'Neil informed the midshipman. "They've detached them from their springs. If we hadn't known they were there one of us would have caught his foot in a piece of innocent looking vine which would have pulled a trigger and sent twenty or more spears across the trail with force sufficient to penetrate a pine board."

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Phil half wished that he had not volunteered for this nerve-racking ordeal. After all what did he owe Tillotson? Had not the army man tried to injure him in every way? Yet the lad knew for that very reason he had asked to be allowed to risk his own life to rescue him. Then he thought suddenly of O'Neil. His stalwart form was just ahead of him, dimly outlined in the darkness. Had he acted generously to this brave and willing sailor?

"O'Neil, I am mighty sorry I brought you along," he exclaimed suddenly.

O'Neil stopped in his tracks so suddenly that the two brown men bumped their heads with some force against his back and cried out with surprise.

"Why, sir!" he answered in an aggrieved tone. "Have I done anything to displease you, sir?"

Phil laughed outright, only to be prodded by the sharp bayonets of his captors for his incautiousness.

"If that's the way you feel about it," he said, "I am glad you are here."

Inside of ten minutes, conversation was

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impossible, for they needed all their breath for the precipitous climb up the face of the cliff leading to the top of the mountain. The natives on each side of the prisoners pulled and pushed them up the jagged and rocky trail until their bodies were bruised and their skin torn in many places by the cruel cactus and "Spanish bayonet," which seemed to have been planted by nature as a further difficulty for those who dared to ascend the secret trail to the insurgent stronghold.

After many rests, out of breath, footsore, bleeding and tired, the top was reached and with scant courtesy O'Neil and Phil were thrown into a nipa shack, where they fell unceremoniously on top of a sleeping human being who awakened with a cry of alarm and fear, striking at them with his manacled hands.

"It's Lieutenant Tillotson," O'Neil exclaimed gladly, as he rolled away to the farthest side of the small hut, to put himself out of reach of the startled prisoner.

"Who are you?" came from the figure, in a weak voice. "Yes, I am Lieutenant Tillotson. Tell me I'm not dreaming. Didn't I hear a white man's voice?"

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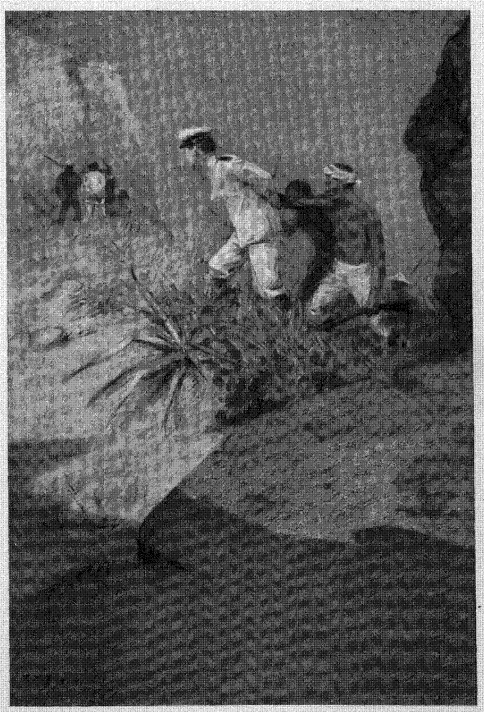

UP THE FACE OF THE CLIFF

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Phil could see him dimly by the light of the camp-fire outside. The man had been completely cowed. What terrible torture had been inflicted to cause him to become such an abject figure, groveling before them, his voice hollow, and in his eyes a light of unreasonable fear?

"It is Midshipman Perry and O'Neil from the gunboat, Tillotson," the lad whispered. "We hope to save you if you will keep quiet and do just what we tell you." Phil could have wept in pity at the sight of the physical wreck before him. He was shocked at the sight. Tillotson's eyes were dull and the face empty of hope.

"You don't know what you are saying," he answered in a monotonous voice. "No one can be saved who is brought to this place. Death is the one avenue of escape. Oh! No one knows of the tortures I have endured from that fiend's hands." Then his face lit up for a second as he raised himself from the ground and stared at Phil, who had approached and stood looking down pityingly upon him. "How can you save me? Oh, tell me the truth. Are you not prisoners also?"

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Phil seated himself by the side of the unnerved man and begged him to be calm and reserve his strength. After a few moments he told him of the plan and his hopes for success.

"Let us pray for success," the captive cried weakly. "I had determined to throw myself off the cliff rather than undergo another day's torture."

Tillotson talked for an hour, gruesomely dwelling on the details of his horrible treatment by Espinosa. He told of his mission to the spy, with the letter which Phil had taken from the dead messenger at Binalbagan. The message was in Espinosa's own handwriting, and warned the attackers of the gunboat's approach.

"I see now that I have been repaid for my stupidity," he moaned. "I believed that I could unmask him and earn the thanks of the general, but first I wished to get from him a full confession and implicate his accomplices. I showed him the letter and told him I would call at his house after visiting the sentries." The overwrought officer broke down and sobbed for several minutes before continuing.

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"I was a child in his hands; I did not know his power. His followers trapped me and carried me away by water, bringing me to this awful place. Every day some new torture is devised for me. To-day I was suspended by my neck with only my toes on the ground. That was the worst so far. I don't know what it will be to-morrow," he ended with a shudder.

Phil tried to console him as best he could, but a great fear had entered his thoughts. If this terrible punishment had been meted out to Tillotson, what would the treacherous and cruel Espinosa devise for him? Surely something many, many times more horrible.

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CHAPTER XVIII

A RIVER EXPEDITION

After Phil and his party had gone on their hazardous mission, Sydney went aboard the gunboat to make ready for the work which had been left in his hands. He felt it keenly that he could not share this dangerous expedition, but there was some consolation in the knowledge that O'Neil was with Phil.

Another detachment, footsore and tired from its forced march from a distant post, had arrived at the ranch, and the two staff officers were untiringly arranging all the details for the attack in force.

Sydney, upon his arrival on the gunboat, gave orders that all obstructions be cleared away from the guns, and directed the placing of iron sheeting to protect the officers and men who would be, with him, exposed on the gunboat's bridge.

The plan of attack was to divide the force of soldiers; the gunboat to carry as many of

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the men as her limited deck space would accommodate, and the remainder were to go by trail, guided by Garcia. A sufficient force would remain to guard the ranch, to which point supplies were on their way up the river from Palilo.

General Wilson would command the expedition in person from on board the gunboat.

At sunrise Sydney was awake, and already the camp ashore was alive and the lad saw the companies drawn up, their rifles stacked, eating their morning meal. Hurriedly dressing he was rowed ashore, but before leaving he had ordered all his boats to be lowered for transporting the soldiers to the gunboat.

"Major Lukban, one of Rodriguez's officers, will go with you as a guide," Captain Blynn informed the lad as he stepped ashore. "He was wounded in the attack on the ranch, but he is well enough to go on the gunboat, and he knows the navigation of the river. He is now questioning an insurgent officer who was brought in by one of our companies; they captured him in a village several miles from here.

"Lukban is like a wild beast; they have

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just told him of Rodriguez's murder by Espinosa and Salas, so I suppose we had best keep an eye on this unfortunate prisoner."

Captain Blynn led Sydney down to the basement of the ranch house. The midshipman, when his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, gave an exclamation of surprised horror as he saw a half-strangled native on the floor with several others astride his heaving chest. Sydney noticed the wounded major in a chair, looking down upon his victim, a savage smile on his face.

"It's not strictly orthodox," Captain Blynn whispered as he saw the horror in Sydney's eyes, "but it's effective."

"A little more," Major Lukban ordered in a cold voice, after nodding a welcome to the newcomers.

Sydney saw the native at the prisoner's head slowly pour the water which he held in a bamboo cup between the prisoner's teeth. The unfortunate man choked, while the veins in his neck stood out like whip-cords. His eyes turned glassy and staring, while his colorless face became a sickly blue.

"You'll kill him," Sydney cried aghast.

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"It shouldn't be allowed, captain," he appealed, turning to the army man.

"Don't you worry, Monroe," the captain answered calmly, "he knows within a few drops of how much the man can stand—watch!" he added quietly, as the natives raised the prone captive to a sitting position and struck him smartly on the back with their open hands. The native coughed and sputtered; gradually his color returned and he drew great gasping breaths.

After the prisoner had returned to a comparatively normal condition, the inquisitor reached out his hand and struck him smartly across the cheek. Where his hand had fallen, a white imprint was left, dying out gradually, as the sluggish blood flowed back again.

"This is the 'water cure,'" Captain Blynn observed as Major Lukban fired question after question at the thoroughly cowed and now tractable prisoner. "He will exact a confession from him which will give us all the information we need. If you or I did this we would be court-martialed and maybe dismissed but——" He ended with an expressive shrug.

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Sydney turned sick at the sight of a human being tortured beyond endurance and a fear rose in his mind as he thought of poor Phil in Espinosa's hands. As he watched, the native appeared to hesitate in answering a question, but a wave of Lukban's hand, bringing the attending natives and the water cup nearer, caused him to answer the question immediately. Once the native refused to answer and then despite his cries of fear and struggles almost superhuman, he was forced back upon his back, and his jaws pried rudely open with a stick, while the bamboo cup was poised menacingly above his open mouth.

The next moment the cup was sent spinning from the native's hand and Sydney had jerked the captive to his feet, and stood flushed with anger and excitement between him and his torturer.

"I shan't stand by and see any more of this torture," he exclaimed forcefully. "It's a disgrace for us to allow it."

Captain Blynn shrugged his shoulders, while Lukban glared angrily at the indignant champion.

"But, señor, I must have that question an-

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swered," he declared. "It will not injure him, and it may save us many lives."

"What was the question?" Captain Blynn asked.

"Whether there is a third trail from the stronghold and how it may be reached," he answered. "You see, captain, if there is we must guard it, for otherwise all will escape us."

Captain Blynn nodded, glancing amusedly at Sydney's excited face.

"I am afraid, major, that question must remain unanswered," he said in a level tone, turning and leading the way out.

Sydney turned the half-drowned prisoner over to one of Captain Blynn's soldiers with orders to guard him carefully and to allow no interference by their native allies.

By nine o'clock two hundred men had been embarked on the gunboat and five hundred more had started under the command of Captain Blynn along the trail leading up the river; Garcia as leader was at their head.

In the party on the gunboat were General Wilson, Major Marble and Major Lukban; the latter, still sullen and angry with Sydney for his unwarranted presumption in making him

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discontinue his torture, stood with his former victim on the bridge of the "Mindinao."

Sydney headed the vessel into the narrow channel, cautiously picking his way through the numerous shoals; one minute the gunboat clung closely to the steep river bank on one side and the next it was scraping the overhanging trees on the other side.

From the masthead the lookout kept the soldiers on shore in sight, and Sydney regulated his speed to just keep pace with them. He thought often and with grave concern of Phil. What luck had he had? His heartbeats quickened as he vaguely wondered if he were alive! He realized the terrible cruelty of the Filipino leader, and Espinosa had reason to hate the young naval man!

The small house, where the midshipmen had unexpectedly met Colonel Salas, flashed into view as they rounded a bend in the river, and from the bridge Sydney could discern with his glasses far in the distance the enemy's stronghold, Matiginao, "the impregnable."

As the gunboat swept slowly by close in shore the soldiers waved their campaign hats

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in silent salute to their formidable navy ally.

"This, from here on, is unknown river, sir," Sydney reported to the general, sitting calmly talking with his adjutant-general.

The general nodded and answered with a smile.

"All right, admiral, I am entirely satisfied to rely upon your judgment."

Major Lukban had during the gunboat's progress up the river stood by Sydney's side, showing his appreciation of the lad's navigation at intervals by a silent nod, while at the same time he kept one guarding eye upon his captive, whose crafty, sullen eyes roved incessantly along the wooded slopes of the narrowing river.

"This is not new to you then, major?" Sydney asked suddenly, as he directed the ship's head toward a large dead tree which stood out a lone sentinel on a rocky point ahead.

"As a boy I was brought up on this river," the native replied sadly. "Then many thousand of my people lived in plenty and happiness along its banks."

"Where have they all gone?" the lad in-

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quired interestedly, his eyes gazing about for the signs of a deserted population.

Lukban pointed to the tall mountains ahead of them.

"Time and again the Spaniards have endeavored to drive out the outlaws from yonder stronghold, and the poor people who made their living on the river were mercilessly preyed upon by the war parties of the contending factions, until none were left. Juan Rodriguez alone has managed to remain, but only by his fearless courage and the devotion of his followers. Neither side cared to provoke him in his security until Espinosa coveted his lands and his money and, who can say, maybe his beautiful daughter."

"Maria!" Sydney exclaimed.

The native lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Espinosa has had but one ambition all his life; to marry the daughter of Rodriguez; but she scorned him, and to save her from his persistent attention, Señorita Maria was sent away to Manila to school. Now he has robbed her of her father and stolen the treasure which had been hoarded for her. For many years Espinosa has been the head of the outlaws of

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Kapay. Holding positions of trust under Spanish rule, he directed the rebel movements and prevented their annihilation by the Spanish columns. This identical work he has attempted under the American rule, but his treachery has at last been exposed. Until he openly threatened the life of Rodriguez, none of us dared to thwart him. His murderers are everywhere, and his society of the Katipunan is far-reaching. Nowhere in the archipelago is one safe from their vengeance. Maria, woman as she is, has been marked for the assassin's knife if she continues to refuse to become the wife of its leader. Garcia, Rodriguez's trusted friend and overseer, was lured by terrible threats of vengeance and hopes of reward to betray his benefactor. He had been chosen by the society to commit the repulsive crime of murdering his friend. He came to the Rodriguez house intending to kill the father and carry away the daughter into captivity, which would have been for her a living death. Through the administering of the water and the voluntary confessions of Garcia, I have found out every motive which has actuated both Espinosa and Garcia. The

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would-be murderer entered the room of his victim, but in the light of the lamp could not bring himself to murder his lifelong friend. He at least had remaining some of the kindlier feelings in his heart. Turning out the light he was about to despatch him with a swift dagger thrust as he lay innocently sleeping; then hearing a noise on the stairs he withdrew into the darkness of an adjoining room. It was Señorita Maria and the two Americans who had remained to protect her. Seeing that to stay would mean discovery, he escaped by a window, intending to meet Espinosa and his men as they stole through the uproar of the bolo attack and tell him of the locality of the treasure. Espinosa is a leader of no mean order. His attack on the ranch was masterfully executed. Even though wounded, he came unhindered through the thick of the attack, with his body-guard of twenty faithful men. These were the ones who entered the house and carried away the treasure chests.

"When Garcia, escaping, reached the ground, your trusty boatswain's mate, O'Neil, was on the spot."

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Major Lukban's eyes were on his restive captive as he talked in low tones to Sydney.

"We must keep an eye on him," he continued. "He has given me so much information that he would be killed if he fell into Espinosa's hands. Knowing the danger he runs, acting as our guide, he may attempt to escape."

The "Mindinao" was now where the dapper little colonel had taken his involuntary bath. The river had become sensibly narrower and the shores more treacherously rocky.

The captive suddenly turned and excitedly spoke to Major Lukban in the native language, his gaze meanwhile roving over the cliffs just visible ahead.

Lukban gave Sydney the man's words in Spanish:

"He says the gunboat can pass through the cañon, but you must keep close to the left hand shore to avoid the huge rocks which the insurgents will hurl from the top of the stronghold."

Sydney's heart beat faster. They had not as yet come in sight of the whirling maelstrom of water as it hurled itself through the narrow

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gorge, but the top of the cañon was in plain sight. One huge boulder dislodged from the heights, striking the deck of the "Mindinao," could easily pierce her frail steel shell.

"Will you go through on the gunboat, sir?" Sydney asked the general eagerly as the "Mindinao" rounded a bend in the river, and the muddy racing water loomed ahead straight as if nature had laid a ruler along its path. About a mile away the other end of the cañon appeared, a white streak of light between the sombre rocks.

The general regarded him in surprise.

"How would you expect me to go?" he asked, a twinkle appearing in his eyes for a fraction of a second.

"I was thinking of the danger, sir," the lad added hurriedly in apology. "They'll probably throw rocks down on us."

"The commanding general cannot always be three miles in the rear," the veteran replied, now smiling broadly.

Sydney had sent word to the engine room that he desired all speed possible and despite the current against them, the wooded shores were passed quickly.

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"To your guns," he called in a clear voice without a note of excitement. "Major," he added turning to the adjutant-general, "some of your best shots might take station to pick off the enemy on the cliffs. Those on this end I hope will be Phil and his friendly natives." He turned suddenly pale as the possibility occurred to him of shelling his own people.

The gunboat sped swiftly toward the cañon. Through glasses the jagged rocks at the top could be seen covered with a curious crowd of natives. Several sharp reports came muffled to his ears. The soft coo of the alarm concha vibrated above the stillness. He called his three gun-pointers up on the bridge and cautioned them with painstaking care of their important duty. "Shoot at the middle and the left; Captain Perry is on that mountain and I hope at this end. All three will fire together and I will control from here."

The men listened gravely and returned to their guns.

"Load," Sydney ordered harshly. The breech-blocks clicked shut and the crew stood expectantly alert. The soldiers, unaccustomed

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to artillery, unconsciously edged away from the three bow guns.

"Set your sights at 1,500 yards," Sydney directed, at the same time giving a signal to the helmsman to hold the ship steady on her course.

"Fire when you're on, aim at the edge of the rock," he said in a tense voice.

The three guns roared almost in unison and three black dots winged swiftly out toward the frowning cliffs ahead of the gunboat. Three dull brown splashes suddenly appeared just under the edge of the cliff and the reverberations died out slowly to an unearthly wail.

"Seventeen hundred," the lad cried out sharply, for the shots had fallen short of the mark.

The sight-setters corrected their sights by a swift movement of the wheel under their hand and the air was again rent by the discharges.

"Fine shots," the general exclaimed excitedly as he leveled his glass at the top of the mountain where the three shells had exploded, scattering the rock and dirt in all directions

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and causing the inquisitive insurgents to hurriedly seek shelter.

"Rapid fire," Sydney ordered calmly and his voice had scarcely died away when a puff of white smoke belched from the stronghold.

The lad's heart almost stopped beating. Artillery he did not fear, if he could return the fire. He was confident that he could take care of himself with those three unerring guns, but this gun of the enemy was mounted just where Phil had warned him not to shoot. He sickened at the thought of disobeying the order, yet there was the menacing screech of the shell in his ears, as it struck the water only a few hundred yards ahead of his approaching gunboat.

What else could he do? The gun must be silenced before the "Mindinao" could proceed, and the gorge was only a thousand yards ahead.

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CHAPTER XIX

A WILLING CAPTIVE

THE sun was high the next morning before Phil awakened from his sound sleep. He had tossed on his hard bed listening to the half morbid ravings of poor Tillotson. Ever before him was the fear that after all he would be unable to save him. He knew only too well the difficulties that must be overcome before a rescue were possible. He recalled the difficult trails over which he and O'Neil had been led. At every point they had been under the eyes of unseen men on top of the mountain and within the range of modern rifles. There was not a tree nor rock large enough to offer cover to the men who on the morrow would assault the stronghold. His heart ever beat faster as he pictured the fight in his imagination: The natives behind intrenchments, cornered, no retreat open to them, fighting with the courage of despair;

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and the American soldiers, fearlessly charging upward, giving no heed to the danger at the top. On the summit, the lad knew, it would be a fight to the death. The part he was to play had seemed only too simple in the light of day, but now in the silence of the night, bound as he was hand and foot, and guarded by cruel enemies who would gladly shoot him down at the first show of force, all seemed different. O'Neil's healthy body had long since been wrapped in slumber and when Phil's feverish eyes opened he was up and seated calmly by the lad's side.

"There are over a thousand of these gugus here in the camp," he exclaimed as Phil with difficulty arose and endeavored to stretch his cramped limbs. "I have been spying from the door there, and I see Lopez has encamped his men right at the top of the trail, and the men who were there have been sent somewhere else. The natives who are guarding us are our own men, and one of 'em tried to stick his bayonet in me when I asked him for some water to wash in. I wish they were not so careful of appearances," he added with a grim smile.

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This was certainly cheering news. Lopez then had won his first point with the insurgent leader. Espinosa had believed his story.

Lieutenant Tillotson still lay like a log, completely overcome from exhaustion, caused by his torture of yesterday. Phil looked with compassion on the weak, boyish face; he was breathing evenly, but his skin was of an unhealthy pallor.

"He looks ill, sir," O'Neil declared as Phil turned away with a sigh. "A few more days will do for him. He's got too sensitive a nature for soldiering."

The doorway was darkened by the entrance of two natives. Phil regarded them coldly as they advanced, and led him not ungently by the arm out into the sunshine. There they cut his binding cords and gave both him and O'Neil a bucket of water to wash in. They had been on the point of arousing Tillotson by a cruel kick, but through Phil's insistence, they left the shack without disturbing the sleeping man.

After eating and enjoying a scanty breakfast, the two Americans surveyed with great interest the scenes about them.

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"Do you see that gun there, sir?" O'Neil exclaimed, suddenly nodding his head toward a Spanish howitzer mounted on the cliff just to the right of the trail. "It's manned by Espinosa's men!"

"That's bad," Phil replied anxiously; "and you notice, it commands the river."

"Good-morning," in Spanish from behind them caused Phil to swing about quickly and gaze into the amused but wicked eyes of Colonel Salas. "So we are to have the pleasure of your company as our guest, after all?" the Filipino continued tauntingly. "General Espinosa is making great preparations for your reception. It is needless for me to tell you how delighted he is that you have changed your mind. He was very angry at me for not insisting on your coming with me the other day."

Phil regarded the little native, a fine scorn in his eyes. He would have liked nothing better than to have answered him in the same ironical vein, but he realized that to do so and anger him would only make more difficult their position.

"He will be here to pay his respects shortly,"

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Salas continued ironically. "Ah! here he comes now."

With his heart beating fast and the muscles in his throat tightening, Phil saw Espinosa sauntering toward them. He was dressed in the uniform of a Filipino general, made in the Spanish fashion, of a mouse-colored duck with a rolling collar, on which a silver star glistened. He came slowly forward, a wicked smile on his face.

"Señor Perry! So! I have you now in my power?" he said in a low, hard voice. "I knew that my time would come. Your cleverness caused me some inconvenience. Colonel Martinez is still to be accounted for. But"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"that is but a matter of days. You can see that I am now master of the situation. I shall annihilate your untried, inefficient volunteers with as much ease as I can kill flies on the wall of a butcher shop. Your general dare not call in his men from the garrisons in the north. After I have worn out and killed those sent against me, then I shall attack Palilo itself. Then when I have the city in my hands and your general has withdrawn or surrenders, I

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shall wire to Manila my willingness to accept civil government. I shall go through the form of surrendering to the vanquished Americans, and shall be made the governor of Kapay. I shall then carry on my authority under your own flag. Is it not a very clever plan? Ah, there is one point that I have forgotten, a governor of an island as rich as Kapay must have a suitable dwelling. Very well. Señor Rodriguez is no more; his house is vacant and adequate for the worthy purpose; and the señorita—how well the title of wife to the governor of Kapay would become her!

"So you see, señor, after all, Espinosa has lost nothing," he ended with mock politeness.

Phil glared angrily at this vain, boastful Malay half-breed. How dare he even think of marrying a girl like Maria Rodriguez? Phil knew that she would rather die first.

"Every man in the American army will fight you to the last fence," Phil exclaimed savagely. "Your villainy and treachery are too well known among even your own people, who serve you only through fear. You will never be made a governor under the civil government. That won't aid you to carry out

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your vengeful purposes upon those whom you might choose to call your enemies."

Espinosa's face paled slightly, and his eyes kindled in anger.

"I am sorry that I cannot allow you to remain alive to see my prophecy come true," he replied with a cruel shrug. "And before I am found out, as you Americans say, and displaced, I shall have enough money put aside in banks outside of the Philippines to live in ease and luxury for the remainder of my life.

"These thoughts," he added, "may cheer your last hours. It should be a pleasure to you to know that you haven't done me as much harm as you supposed."

Phil glared at his tormentor, a bitter hatred in his eyes. How cleverly had this half-breed played upon the credulity of the Americans! For months this despicable native had ruled over both the warring parties; on one hand controlling the native bands of insurgents, telling them how, when and where to attack their enemy and then by his plausible words and treacherous cunning had exerted sufficient influence over General Wilson and his aides to enable him to so dispose the scattered

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American troops as to make them impotent, helpless against the insurgent ambushes and attacks. The lad noticed with a certain satisfaction that the native wore his left arm in a sling. Was that then the effect of his shot the night of the meeting of the Katipunan society? How he blamed himself for not having taken a more careful aim; he remembered with disappointment that when he had pulled the trigger of his revolver, his aim had been to the left of Espinosa's body. Phil's gaze was not lost on the half-breed. With a snarl he glanced down at his almost helpless arm.

"For this I took Rodriguez's life with my own hands, although Garcia had been chosen for the deed," he exclaimed darkly, "and for this I shall force his daughter to become the wife of Manuel Espinosa."

Phil gasped, a flood of angry blood mounting to his temples.

"It was I who fired the shot," the lad cried exultantly, "and the next time you won't get off so easily."

Espinosa in sullen rage regarded the angry midshipman through his slit-like eyes.

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"You?" he cried in unfeigned surprise. "How did you get there?"

"I was there," Phil replied quickly, a keen satisfaction entering his thoughts at being able to beard the lion in his den, "and afterward exposed you to the general—but," he asked suddenly, "why did you desert? If you hadn't we would have had a pleasant little hanging party in the Plaza the next morning."

Espinosa was evidently enraged at the lad's daring words.

"You are brave," he said suddenly, a spark of suspicion coming into his mind, "to speak this way before me knowing that I can have you hung, or tortured, by simply giving the order."

"I know your yellow soul too well," Phil declared in answer, "to believe that anything I might say now would influence the plan for revenge which you have already made. But I am curious to know why you left Palilo so suddenly. Did you believe that Rodriguez would betray you?"

The outlaw glared at the midshipman, his hands twitching longingly to take forcible hold on his tormentor.

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"Because of that shot," Espinosa answered finally, "I feared there might have been an enemy at the meeting and I feared Captain Blynn's hand,—I would give a box of old Rodriguez's gold to have him here a prisoner," he added, a flash of terror in his eyes.

"He may be here any moment now," Phil said quietly. Then he would have bitten off his tongue as he saw the sudden gleam of suspicion in his enemy's eyes.

Espinosa gave the lad a searching look. "What do you mean?" he asked casting a glance of fear about him.

"Oh, nothing," the lad answered carelessly, "only he knows you killed Rodriguez, stole his money and tried to carry off his daughter; also by this time he will know that I'm a prisoner in your hands. And if for no other reason, you hold Lieutenant Tillotson, and his father is overturning the war department to rescue him. You made a bad fist of it there."

Phil had been watching the native leader's anxious face, as he glanced about him as if half fearing the big American to appear suddenly from the ground. He now saw it light

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up with keen enjoyment as his eyes encountered something which amused him. Looking up quickly the lad uttered an exclamation of horror as he realized with overwhelming force the true position in which he had placed himself and his trusted boatswain's mate.

O'Neil, bound hand and foot, had been triced up, his toes just resting on the ground, and his strong bronzed face swollen and blue from a strangling rope knotted about his neck, the end thrown over a framework apparently built for this diabolical torture.

Phil turned his face away. He saw as through a red mist the throngs of curious natives who had quickly gathered to see their enemy slowly murdered before their eyes.

Espinosa gave a guttural order and immediately Phil was seized and forced to gaze at the revolting torture of his companion.

"We shall not kill him yet," Espinosa said, while he smiled in keen delight at the discomfited midshipman. "I have promised my men a field day. We have many amusing ways of treating our guests,—but," he added, "before your turn comes I wish

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some information which I know you can give.

"Where is General Wilson?" he asked anxiously, "and is it true that your gunboat is in the river?"

"Where are your scouts?" Phil exclaimed haughtily. "Ask them, not your prisoner."

"I choose to ask my prisoner," the native retorted with a meaning glance at those who held Phil's head turned so that he must see out of the tail of his eyes the cruel suffering of O'Neil.

"Your prisoner does not choose to answer," the lad declared stoutly.

The next second Phil was jerked suddenly upon his back, and his hands and feet hauled out, spread eagle fashion to stakes driven in the solid ground. He was quite helpless, and the pain in his arms and legs was excruciating. He opened his mouth to cry out when quickly a wedge of hard wood was inserted, holding his jaws wide apart.

He closed his eyes and stiffened his muscle in a supreme endeavor to withstand the pain and prevent himself showing his suffering to the delighted natives.

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"Now maybe you will consider your answer —Colonel Salas, a little water may loosen his tongue," he heard the cruel voice of Espinosa say.

A horrible fear overcame the lad. The water cure was to be given him. He was to be half drowned. To be made to feel all the torturing sensations of a drowning man; not once but many times, until his spirit was broken and he would answer questions which would make him traitorously injure his own cause. His eyes opened, and he saw dimly Espinosa's mocking face above him. The sun had flamed forth from under a cloud and burned down unmercifully on his staring eyes. He noted vaguely that it had passed the meridian. Then a terrible fear came into his mind. Where were the gunboat and the soldiers? Surely by this time they would have made their presence known. Had the gunboat run aground and the expedition been delayed? Would a delay mean death to him and O'Neil or only one more awful day of diabolical torture?

"If you will cease torturing my man," Phil said with difficulty through his wedged jaws, "I will answer your questions."

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Espinosa laughed cruelly.

"So you would dictate your own terms," he cackled. "Colonel Salas, just a few cupfuls. Captain Perry seems thirsty."

Phil swallowed the water as it was poured down his throat, holding his breath long intervals at a time. It seemed to him that the water was never ending; he had swallowed quarts and yet he drank. Finally he could swallow no longer and yet the cruel hand above him poured the liquid without ceasing into his wide open mouth. The water splashed and ran out. He managed yet to breathe by contracting the muscles of his throat and then taking a slow breath but even then he felt the irritation of a few drops of water in his lungs and he knew if he coughed, as he must in a second, that all the water in his throat and mouth would enter his windpipe and fairly choke him. A feeling of suffocation oppressed him, as if a heavy weight lay pressing on his chest. He knew as yet he had not suffered, that this was but a taste of what was to come. Once more, this time as if from a great distance, he heard the cold, sinister voice of the half-breed.

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"Before it is too late," he said, "will you answer my questions?"

Phil opened his eyes and gazed at his tormentors. Then he closed them and steeled himself to what was to come.

He felt his nose held securely by muscular fingers and his head thrown back, making a reservoir of his mouth, which was kept full of water.

Just before he closed his eyes Phil had taken a full breath and now with his lungs full of air he knew that the agony was less than two minutes away. Strong swimmer as he was, he knew that was the limit of his endurance, and then afterward would come the sickening sensation of water agonizingly breathed into his lungs. Congestion would follow and if there was any trouble with his heart it would stop. If not, the cruel Colonel Salas who, with a delighted smile, was pouring the water, would stop and free the lad's mouth of water, permitting him to regain his breath, working over him as if he were a half-drowned man, and after he had been brought to by artificial respiration, the cruel torture would be begun again and

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carried out until he agreed to do his enemy's bidding.

Those two minutes were the longest in the lad's life. His entire past flashed before his eyes and he shed tears of disappointment at the thought that this might be his death. He wondered how much time had passed. Then he began to count the seconds, but soon stopped in horror; it was too much like self-destruction. He held his breath now tightly, allowing just a little air at a time to escape through his throat. He opened his eyes once or twice, but he could see nothing but a fiery sun overhead. He had the sensation that his entire body was swelling. Every vein seemed to have hardened. The sweat poured from his forehead, stinging his eyes.

He could hold his breath no longer. His blood throbbed painfully in his temples. An awful nausea overcame him, and he gasped for air.

Then a sharp sound as of the discharge of a cannon sounded in his ears and he fought and struggled with the strength of a score of men for the precious air.

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CHAPTER XX

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE STRONGHOLD

WHILE Phil and O'Neil were being tortured by Espinosa, Lopez had kept watch from his station, guarding the trail leading up the precipitous mountain from the valley below. His eyes fascinatedly held upon the scene in front of him had nevertheless guardedly turned backward, scanning anxiously the wooded foothills below him and the vista of the river as it entered the cañon. As yet no signs of the rescuers were visible. He trembled when he saw that Espinosa had determined to give the midshipman the water torture. But few white men had survived its harshness. Lopez's face wore an increasingly anxious look as the minutes dragged into hours. The sun had passed the meridian and was dipping slowly in the western sky. His own men had not left their posts ; each understood his duty ; Rodriguez's faithful followers alone had been selected to guard this southern

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bastion of the stronghold. The faithful native could see a handful of Espinosa's men at the howitzer mounted to command the approach by water and farther along the edge of the precipice small knots of men squatting under shelters of bamboo. These latter he knew were to dislodge great boulders, which had been delicately balanced ready to be thrown downward, five hundred or more feet, into the racing river. Those who dared to enter the treacherous waters of the cañon must run the gauntlet of these huge rocks, but Lopez knew that the Americans would take any risk to reach the trail leading away from the stronghold and further into the mountain fastness, over which the trapped insurgents would endeavor to escape.

Several hundred natives, their weapons in hand, had gathered about their cruel leader. Every eye was turned in rapt enjoyment toward the delighting spectacle of the torture of a despised American. None save Lopez and his faithful guards had observed the glint of steel far down in the valley below. None save he discerned two small white poles creeping along above the high trees on the river

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bank. He glanced uneasily toward the torture. Phil was on his back securely bound, while Colonel Salas held above his head a long bamboo cane filled with water.

Lopez whispered an order to a native sergeant and the latter noiselessly edged his way in the direction of the sailor, now apparently senseless, deserted by those who had been torturing him, now that they were being indulged in a more interesting spectacle.

Lopez, his heart beating and his bronze face set determinedly, watched the two topmasts of the gunboat as they traveled toward the bend in the river. The next second the "Mindinao's" white bow came slowly, majestically from behind the land and turned gracefully up the river toward the cañon. At the foot of the trail khaki-clad figures suddenly appeared and mounted slowly up the narrow path. He could see the guides in front clearing and uncovering the treacherous man traps. His men had now seen the approaching deliverers and their black eyes snapped excitedly. Any one with half an eye would have known that something out of the ordinary was going forward. The eager

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brown soldiers of Rodriguez moved about restlessly, glancing excitedly down into the valley below them. Fortunately the leader and his followers were too absorbed in watching the suffering of poor Phil to take heed of the strange behavior of the deserters from Rodriguez.

Lopez saw the little gunboat stop suddenly in the river and he observed plainly groups of men at the bow guns. Then came a flash of flame from her white hull and a reverberation which shook the mountain stronghold to its foundation.

The tortured and half-dead Americans were forgotten; their captors had rushed away to see the meaning of this interruption. It was but the work of an instant for the watchful Lopez to sever with a few swift strokes of his bolo the cords that bound his white chief. O'Neil was likewise cut down, and the two nearly lifeless men were dragged to the safety of that part of the stronghold guarded by Lopez and his small band.

Shell after shell came speeding up from the gunboat, and meanwhile the khaki-clad soldiers, unobserved, toiled onward up the slope.

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"To your posts," Espinosa cried out in alarm. "Open fire with that gun." The surprised and terrified leader raved like a madman, taking all to task for their stupidity. Phil had been released so promptly, while all was uproar and confusion, that as yet the insurgents had not realized that Lopez and his men were against them. Espinosa, in a fever of excitement, himself ran to the howitzer and with his own hands pointed and fired the first shot. But that was the last shot the gun would ever fire, for Lopez with a number of his men pushed quietly forward, cutting its binding ropes and shoved it over the edge of the cliff from which it crashed downward to the river below.

Espinosa turned aghast and met the cold, defiant eye of Lopez. In them he read his doom. Lopez's sharp bolo was already circling about his head. But the next second it had flashed harmlessly by and rattled on the rocky ground. Fearful of his life Espinosa had dodged the blow aimed at him and had taken flight, screaming as he ran for his men to open fire on the traitors. The shells of the gunboat seemed to fall in every part of the

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stronghold and the havoc of their explosions was terrible to witness; but the small band under Lopez remained unharmed.

Mad with fear, the natives who had been witnessing Phil's torture, upon hearing the terrifying words of their leader and seeing the awful havoc behind them caused by the bursting shell, charged boldly on the natives in their front, believing that in that direction lay their one avenue of escape, but a well directed volley from Lopez's men made them recoil in disorder.

Like one who is chained, powerless in the grip of an unnerving nightmare, Phil felt rather than saw the wild scenes about him. He heard the sharp rattle of musket fire and the sonorous discharge of cannon, the wild, vibrant cries of the natives as they dashed now forward and again retreating from the clash of contact and the avenging strokes of bayonet and bolo. By a mighty effort he struggled to his feet and leaned heavily for support upon the bamboo frame of his prison. His lungs seemed on fire and a red mist was still in his eyes. The riot of forms about him confused his brain and made him dizzy. Then

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his eyes fell upon the body of O'Neil lying on the ground where the natives had dragged him ; the cruel marks of the rope stood out in blue welts on his muscular neck. His eyes were closed, but the lad saw with joy that he was alive. He knelt by the sailor's side ministering to him as tenderly as if he were a child. Then in great anxiety he saw that Lopez's men were slowly giving ground. Stubbornly they fought, but the overwhelming ranks of the enemy, now alive to the actual conditions and spurred forward by their leaders, came frantically forward across the open ground.

Phil dragged the senseless body of the sailor back until they were on the very edge of the hill and then a sight which made him mad with joy caused him to stand upright and swing his hat jubilantly, unheeding the leaden missiles on all sides. There scarcely a hundred yards below him struggling forward and upward was Captain Blynn and his five hundred soldiers. Dropping the sailor's head he rushed madly into the company of loyal natives.

"Charge them," he cried, beside himself

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with eagerness, for he saw that if the enemy, one thousand strong, should obtain possession of the top of the trail the struggling men below would never reach the top alive, and their retreat could mean but one thing—a rout and massacre.

The natives did not understand the lad's words, but his meaning was only too plain as he snatched a rifle from the ground and led the remnant of that plucky band.

The next moment he was in the midst of the shrieking horde. In his nostrils was the reek of the Malay, almost sickening in its overpowering pungency. Blow after blow at his body he warded off with the barrel of his rifle.

Now the savage horde had given way and his men had quickly closed in, warily protecting their flanks, knowing full well the cunning of their enemy. To his left the lad saw hundreds of natives hurling rocks into the river below them, and he cut a lane toward them, yelling to the loyal natives to prevent what he feared would be the destruction of his ship. From below the ominous rattle of a Colt gun gladdened his heart and he saw

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with delight the men on the cliffs flee in terror, leaving great boulders balanced menacingly on the very edge of the abyss. An American cheer rang out from behind him and he became dizzy with joy at the good news it brought. He read in the natives' eyes a look of terror at the sudden appearance of an unlooked for enemy, and at the same instant he realized that if he and his loyal natives were to be saved he must extricate them from this dangerous position between the fire of the two opposing forces. He looked wildly about him for Lopez, but he was nowhere in sight, and already the soldiers had begun to open a withering fire in their direction. Mad with their exertions, brought suddenly face to face with the enemy, the soldiers would have no discretion ; friend and foe alike were mixed in one writhing mass of brown.

Then a sinister face showed itself on his right hand and all thoughts of safety were thrown to the winds. Espinosa, the tyrant and murderer, was within his reach. With a score of men as a body-guard he was hurrying away, deserting the field of battle. The midshipman pressed against the enemy to his

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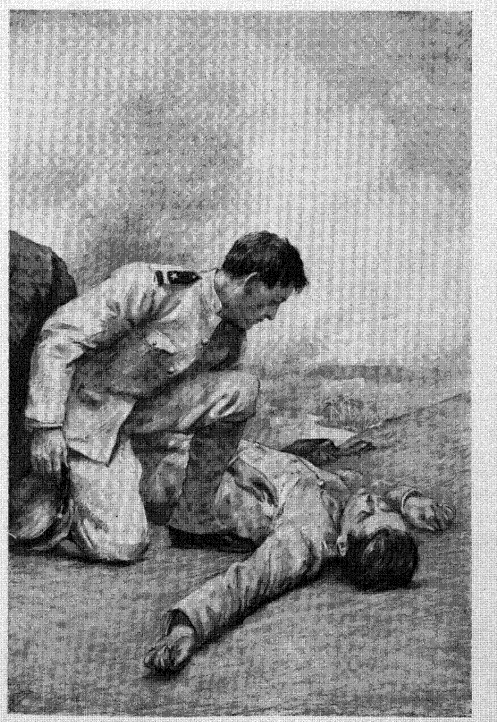

HE GAZED DOWN INTO THE STILL FACE

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right, fighting his way even through the remnant of the loyal natives, crying out to them to follow, while behind him he could hear the heavy footfalls of the soldiers.

A body brushed him nearly off his feet and he turned toward it, his rifle raised as if to ward off an expected blow and then as his eyes fell upon the disheveled figure, he gave a cry of delight.

"O'Neil," he shouted above the noise of the fighting, as he put his arm about the great figure to steady himself from the force of the impact from the khaki-clad soldiers pressing eagerly upon them.

"There's that devil," the sailor cried in smothered rage, and Phil saw with astonishment that O'Neil had naught but his bare hands though the lust of battle was in his eyes. The horror of his recent torture pressed heavily on his mind and he was bending every exertion to reach the retreating insurgent leader.

So closely did the Americans press their foes that the lifeless body of Lieutenant Tillotson was abandoned, and Phil stopped, kneeling at his side and gazed down into the still

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face. There was a deep wound in the neck. Phil saw that the troubled spirit had been released. Ahead the pursuers had stopped and were firing fiercely in the direction of the retreating enemy.

"We can't allow Espinosa to escape," the lad cried, aghast as he regained his men and saw with horror that many lay moaning on the ground.

"They're intrenched there, sir," a sergeant exclaimed. "It would be suicide to charge them;" but Phil had gone too far and had suffered too much to be stopped by any thoughts of discretion or danger.

"Charge, I say," he cried; "that murderer Espinosa must not escape."

The sergeant from his security on the ground gazed up at the lad, believing quite properly that he had lost his mind, but before he could be stopped, Phil was beyond reach, charging blindly forward, while from the intrenchments came a volume of fire which it seemed folly to face.

The seasoned old sergeant shook his head knowingly, but when an officer orders a charge there is but one thing to do.

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As one man the line arose from its shelter and raced madly after the midshipman.

Hand to hand they battled—the natives with a courage born of desperation, for their backs were almost at the sheer edge of a precipice. Slowly they gave way before the onslaught of the Americans.

Phil and O'Neil fought shoulder to shoulder and the lad in his weakened condition, bleeding profusely from a score of wounds, never more sorely needed the help that the brave sailorman could give.

"He's getting away," O'Neil cried out in an agonized voice as the stubborn defenders fell one by one before the avenging bayonets.

The natives died bravely, in fanatical fervor, fighting to the last man, not wishing nor asking for quarter. O'Neil and Phil at last stood upon the brink of a yawning chasm while they saw, far below them, and just disappearing within the shadow of the woods, a small band of natives, while there dangled from the rocks at their feet the severed end of a rope—the leader's road to safety.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE GUNBOAT TAKES A HAND

SYDNEY gazed in consternation at the black speck clinging to the top of the cliff. His hands trembled excitedly as he held his glasses to his eyes focusing upon this spiteful piece of artillery.

"We've got to silence that gun," he said in a hoarse voice to Major Marble at his side, as he rang the engine room telegraphs for full speed astern. "They can't miss us, and one shell would sink us. Yet Phil and O'Neil are probably there."

"There are our men, general," Major Marble reported, pointing to a creeping point of color just emerging from the jungle and showing itself against the neutral tints of the treeless mountainside.

"Make up your mind quickly, Mr. Monroe," the general exclaimed anxiously. "Shell it, or else let's try to get by; we can't afford to

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leave the neck of the sack open for Espinosa and his cutthroats to escape."

Sydney saw there was no way out of the situation, save to silence the battery:—one shot through the boiler of the "Mindinao," and the gunboat with all on board would be killed by the explosion or else drowned in the madly racing current of the river.

"Take a few shots at that gun," he ordered hoarsely. The gun-pointers when they heard the spiteful hiss of the enemy's shell had, as though by an order, ceased their fire and waited obediently for the command which they felt sure the midshipman would give. They did not relish being fired upon and not allowed to return the fire.

Sydney's glasses were upon the cliff: he saw a group of struggling figures about the cannon, and then to his surprise and joy the black object detached itself and dropped swiftly to the water six hundred feet below.

"Don't fire," he cried out quickly, but the gun-pointers through their sight telescopes had also been watching the struggle about their target and had waited.

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The lad rang up full speed ahead and again the gunboat sped toward the cañon.

"Open fire on the left flank of the hill," Sydney ordered.

The three-pounders barked, and shell after shell was sent against the gathering crowds forming to attack the mere handful on the right, where the trail ended. The soldiers under Captain Blynn could now be plainly seen plodding upward.

Sydney's boyish nerves were at the highest pitch of excitement. He realized that he was to perform one of the most difficult feats of his life, and he had the life of a general of the army in his keeping. An error of judgment on his part would send them all to their deaths. He glanced searchingly at the frowning cliff, now scarcely a thousand yards away. He could plainly see that at the top a fierce fight was raging. The narrow gorge ahead seemed barely wide enough to permit the gunboat to pass, and above it, he knew only too well great boulders were standing ready to be dropped like meteors on the frail deck of the "Mindinao."

"Are you ready there with the Colt gun?"

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he called loudly to the sailors in the foretop, where the gun was mounted.

There was no answer ; a glance aloft showed him the crew of the gun grouped anxiously about it.

" Jammed again, I suppose," he exclaimed.

Closer and closer loomed the cañon.

" Look out for the prisoner," Sydney cried out as he saw the native, his hands on the rail, about to leap overboard. Major Marble was near enough to grasp him and the next minute ready hands had bound him securely to the rail and from there he gazed up in terror at the rapidly approaching cliffs.

" There goes the first one," Sydney exclaimed excitedly as a great boulder swayed unsteadily and then rolled slowly over the edge of the chasm and descended with the speed of a shooting star. Every man on the gunboat was on his feet ; above them now was the camp of the outlaws, and several hundred such boulders were there ready to be dropped upon their defenseless heads. The firing of the " Mindinao's " guns had long since stopped as the elevation was much too great.

With a terrific splash which hurled the

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water completely over the bow of the gunboat, the first rock took the water; but another and another followed it in rapid succession, and so close did they fall that Sydney felt the rushes of air caused by their passage. General Wilson stood calmly by as unconcerned as though he were only a spectator at a display of fireworks. Major Marble paced rapidly across the bridge, his hands nervously clutching a rifle which every few seconds he would discharge at the frowning cliffs above him.

To add to the danger there now came the song of enemy's bullets while the water near the gunboat became disturbed as if from the fall of hail. Occasionally there was heard a commotion forward and a man sorely hit would be carried below decks to be attended by the hospital corps located in the men's quarters.

Many of the soldiers and sailors had now opened fire with their rifles, but the falling rocks disconcerted them. Suddenly the Colt gun commenced its sharp drumming discharge. Sydney glanced aloft. He could see his crew directing the stream of lead slowly covering every point of the cliff ahead.

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A cry of delight rose from the Americans, and a cheer broke out from the anxious but relieved men as they noted the immediate effect of the leaden stream. As it swept along the cliffs, those who stood ready to project the balanced rocks upon the heads of their enemy had taken fright, and instead of waiting until the gunboat was immediately beneath them, had in their impatience let go their rocks, and they were falling harmlessly in the water ahead of the gunboat. Sydney steered as near the opposite shore as he dared, fearing that a boulder might have closed the channel. On top of the cliff the sound of strife could still be heard.

Major Marble and Major Lukban anxiously questioned the prisoner. He alone knew the whereabouts of the trail which Espinosa and his men relied upon to furnish an avenue of escape in case the stronghold was successfully attacked. The Filipino officer held his revolver threateningly before the frightened native's eyes.

"If you allow us to pass it, I'll have no mercy," he exclaimed.

The "Mindinao" had now emerged from

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the dangerous cañon and the sound of firing above became less distinct.

General Wilson was becoming impatient. He had held himself well in hand to steady the officers and men under him during the trial through which they had passed so successfully. Now his anxiety was more than he could keep to himself. He rushed up to the cringing native, taking him roughly by the shoulders and crying out to him in English, a language unintelligible to the terrified prisoner.

But the general's act was crowned with success. The insurgent soldier had steeled himself against the threats of Major Lukban, even reinforced as they were with the deadly revolver held to his head, but the wildly gesticulating general had put a terrible fear into his soul. Like all orientals he reverenced and feared rank, and this taciturn American general had so suddenly turned upon him that he was too frightened to do aught else but tell the truth.

"Back there is the place," the native cried in his own language, and Major Lukban in feverish haste translated the man's words,

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while Sydney swung the gunboat about, reversing his engines at full speed to keep from grounding on the rocky shores, and giving small thought to the dangers of the madly racing current.

Within ten minutes, which seemed ages to the eager Americans, the "Mindinao" was anchored in the river and the troops were landed.

Major Lukban with the guide, whose hands were securely bound to prevent his escape, led the party through the tangled underbrush over the secret trail which without the aid of one who had been there before would have been impossible. Tediously the distance was covered, the sounds of battle ever becoming more distinct. General Wilson's age was no handicap to him as he eagerly pressed forward behind the native guides.

The enemy, by the volume of rifle fire which came down to the ears of the anxious column of soldiers, were making a desperate stand to recover the advantage lost by the suddenness of the surprise, and so absorbed were they with Captain Blynn's men that those under the general's command stood on

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the level plateau of the mountain before their presence was discovered. The sight of this unexpected force turned the tide for the Americans and the terrified insurgents threw away their arms and huddled together, expecting to be executed by their enemy without mercy.

General Wilson quietly controlled his eager soldiers, bent upon annihilating these treacherous brown men now within their power. The soldier mind knew but one style of warfare with a savage foe. No quarter had been the insurgent watchword. Kill! kill! had frequently rung in their ears as the fanatical hordes had charged down upon them on many a battle-field.

"Cease firing!" General Wilson's commanding voice rang out above the discharges of musketry, and the bugles signaled the order across the battle-field. "Major Lukban, tell them no harm will come to them if they submit without further resistance," he cried to the native officer at his elbow, pointing toward the panic-stricken hundreds.

The Filipino major calmly walked forward, his hands held above his head in sign of

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peace, and raised his voice in his native language. A hush fell upon the babbling throngs, while the terror in their eyes slowly died out and they dropped on their knees, giving thanks for their miraculous deliverance.

Major Marble and the native officer went fearlessly among the natives, leading them to a point near the river, and placed guards over them to prevent their escape and then, seeing that a struggle was still going forward on the eastern side of the mountain, gathered a force of soldiers about him and hastened to aid those still in the throes of combat.

Almost out of breath the reinforcing column arrived in time to greet Phil and O'Neil standing on the brink of the precipice and hear their exclamations of disappointment at the escape of the coveted insurgent leader.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE ESCAPED OUTLAW

LUKBAN was the first to recover from the stunning news that Espinosa had, by a miracle, escaped out of the Americans' hands when all outlets were supposed to have been covered.

"He doesn't dare stay in Kapay," the native exclaimed after Phil had explained to the general the manner of his escape. "The natives fear him, but without his followers and with the incumbrance of Rodriguez's treasure, the dangers he must face will make him do his utmost to leave the island."

General Wilson listened intently, his eyes wandering over the victorious battle-field behind him where Captain Blynn's men were quietly disarming the now docile natives.

"I fear we cannot stop him now," General Wilson said disappointedly, "but I suppose we should be satisfied with our victory. This means the end of the war on Kapay."

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Lukban had turned and was earnestly engaged in conversation with Lopez, and then he asked several eager questions of Garcia, who had joined the group. Finally he turned to General Wilson, his black eyes snapping with renewed eagerness.

"Lopez wishes to follow him," he exclaimed excitedly. "He will take his hundred men, who are only too anxious to see him captured and punished for his many crimes, and especially for the murder of Señor Rodriguez. If he is pressed closely he will make for the nearest point of escape which by the trail is Banate. This Garcia assures me was his intention if he was defeated. Garcia wishes to go with Lopez, and he can arrange a signal by fires on the hill behind the swamps to be seen by the gunboat at sea. The gunboat must go down the river at once and at sea await the signal. Espinosa must attempt his escape by proa to Megras. It is only fifty miles away and if he reaches there he will be safe for the time among his friends living on that island."

Phil's face suddenly beamed in smiles as Lukban's plan slowly unfolded before him.

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Highly delighted, he shook hands enthusiastically with the speaker, until the latter cried out in pain from the well meant but rough show of appreciation.

"Major Marble and I will return with you at once," General Wilson added quietly to Phil after he had in but a few words approved the proposed plan. "Blynn can settle the question of prisoners. I'd like to have Espinosa behind bars before I wire to Manila giving them this news."

Phil solemnly told of the sad fate of Lieutenant Tillotson and the general shook his head mournfully.

"Maybe it is better so," he whispered half to himself, but to Phil, standing close by, these words from the old soldier's heart came distinctly.

A detail of men carried the body of the dead officer across the battle-field, and as they passed solemnly through the joyful troops who had collected to cheer the white-haired veteran, the soldiers became suddenly silent as their eyes fell upon the stretcher and were told the identity of that figure underneath the flag. None had reverenced the officer in life,

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but in death all were anxious to render respect.

Phil told the general of the pitiful plight of Lieutenant Tillotson, and of the cruel manner of his death, and generously praised the doubtful courage of the army man.

"It's a glorious end for a soldier," General Wilson murmured. "I have always felt that I could welcome it, and now," he added disappointedly, "I shall probably die in my bed like an ordinary citizen. My career is almost over; in another year I shall have left active service behind."

While the general and his party climbed down the difficult trail to reach the gunboat at anchor in the river below them, Lopez and Garcia with their trusty company had nimbly descended the almost precipitous side of the mountain and were eagerly following the trail of the fleeing insurgent and his ill-gotten spoils.

The "Mindinao" steamed fearlessly down the river, her flag at half-mast in honor of those whose mortal remains lay covered on the quarter-deck; the soldiers who had given their lives in the attack on the most formi-

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dable of insurgent strongholds. Phil and O'Neil were given prompt attention by the surgeon and several ugly wounds were carefully dressed. Phil was glad to relinquish his command to Sydney and remained luxuriously in his cot.

At Rodriguez's ranch the gunboat stopped and reverently landed the dead heroes, to be buried in the cemetery, and here General Wilson and his adjutant-general disembarked to return to Palilo by road.

Just as the "Mindinao" started ahead, after landing her passengers, on its way to the mouth of the river, a native canoe paddled rapidly from the landing, and ran up alongside of the gunboat. An excited hail came from its occupant, answered by an angry cry from Major Lukban who turned, his face deathly pale, and his hands trembling, to the midshipmen at his side.

"Señorita Maria is missing," he gasped.

The midshipmen were stunned at the suddenness of this unexpected and disquieting news. Maria captured! What did it mean?

Lukban declared that his first duty was to his young mistress and the lads heartily ap-

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proved of his desire to be landed to attempt to trail the lost girl and her brother.

The excited native was brought on board from his canoe and told the eager men the meagre details of her loss.

She and Juan had gone out to the cemetery in the morning, and had not returned. A search had been made in the afternoon and the footprints of men had been discovered, showing that the girl had fallen into the hands of a party of natives.

The midshipmen bade good-bye to their native friend who entered the canoe and paddled shoreward, and then Phil rang for full speed ahead on the engines.

"The loyalty of these natives to the Rodriguez family is touching," Sydney exclaimed in admiration. "Garcia alone betrayed his friend; but he did it through superstitious fear of the Katipunan society. Lopez is as staunch as a rock, and Lukban, you can see, would lay down his life willingly for his young mistress."

Two hours later the "Mindinao" had steamed through the harbor of Palilo and turned her bow northward.

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During the night Sydney and O'Neil took turns with Phil in standing watch on the gunboat's bridge, carefully searching the shore for the signal agreed upon with Lopez. Would he succeed in coming up with the fleeing outlaw?

The night wore slowly along and morning dawned clear, finding all three of the Americans up and on the bridge of the rapidly moving vessel.

No sails were in sight. A wide expanse of water was before them, while on the port hand the low swamp land of Banate was in plain sight.

Phil steered his ship in toward the bamboo town nestling in the hollow of two small hills in the midst of the swampy mouth of the Mani River. As they approached, the Americans could discover naught but the usual listless life of a Filipino village.

"I'll patrol here," Phil said, as he steered further offshore.

All day long the gunboat steamed backward and forward over fifteen miles of coast line. An occasional sail was sighted and overhauled, only to find in it a handful of frightened fishermen.

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As night approached the gunboat was brought to a stop in the centre of the line of patrol in order that it might be at an equal distance from all possible points of departure, in case Espinosa had eluded his pursuers.

"If he has a proa in waiting, hidden in the swamps of one of these estuaries, he will choose night for his escape," Phil declared as he studied his inaccurate chart, "and at night he can easily elude us, for it is too dark to see a half mile. Our only hope is that there will be no wind, and if the air is sufficiently calm we can hear the dip of oars for miles."

Phil stationed his sailors as lookouts everywhere, with orders to listen alertly and make known to him if they heard the slightest sound.

The night drew on. The others had gone below for their broken night's sleep, and Sydney was alone on the bridge. A half dozen lookouts were alert, peering into the night, their energies bent on catching the faintest sound from the distant shore.

Suddenly Sydney's ears caught a dull sound which seemed to come from the direction of the land. He listened intently, his

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breath held tight. The dawn wind brought to his nostrils the sweet damp smell of earth mingled with the pungent odor of smoke from the early morning fires of the villagers.

All lights were extinguished on the "Mindinao" and the midshipman knew that the vessel was, even at a short distance, invisible.

Now the sound came distinctly to his ears. It was the steady dip of oars and their rattle in the locks. He could hear the low muffled swish as the blades shook themselves clear of the water.

Several of the lookouts reported in whispers the presence of the strange craft.

Gradually the sound approached, the boat invisible, while slowly the gray streak of dawn spread in the east. The sound was now located ahead and the boat appeared to be traveling fast, doubtless propelled by both oars and sail. Was it only a fisherman going out early to spread his nets? Or was it the outlaw Espinosa attempting escape, and carrying off Rodriguez's gold and the more precious treasures, Maria and Juan?

Sydney sent one of the men to call Phil to the bridge immediately.

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CHAPTER XXIII

COLONEL MARTINEZ

MARIA watched with a heavy heart her young friend Phil Perry go cheerfully away to put himself in the hands of the cruel native leader in his endeavor to save the life of a brother officer.

"I never expect to see him alive again," she whispered sorrowfully to her small brother as he stood with big round eyes of wonder gazing at the military preparations for the attack on the insurgent stronghold.

The next day she and Juan gazed wistfully after the long column of khaki-clad American soldiers as they filed silently past the ranch house, taking the trail over which she and her American friends had ridden so merrily but a few days before.

The guard left at the ranch, consisting of two companies of soldiers, quietly stationed its sentries and took up the monotonous

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routine of guarding the many supplies which were arriving by boats from Palilo.

For several long hours the girl brooded over the situation, wondering how she could aid the friends for whom she had learned to hold a high regard. Bemoaning the fate that had made her a helpless woman, she took Juan by the hand and strolled away up the wooded slope toward the family burying grounds where the body of her father peacefully rested. Reaching the newly made mound she placed upon his grave the handful of flowers which she had gathered. In her heart was a great bitterness. Juan, too young to appreciate the magnitude of his loss, chased gleefully the monkeys which chattered in the trees about him, leaping almost into his arms as they eluded his embrace. Following her brother Maria listlessly strolled farther into the gloom of the forest.

Suddenly a low whistle from deeper in the woods attracted her attention. With startled eyes she stopped, her head erect and her bosom heaving in sudden fright.

A man stepped silently from behind a tree and walked toward her. With a glad cry she

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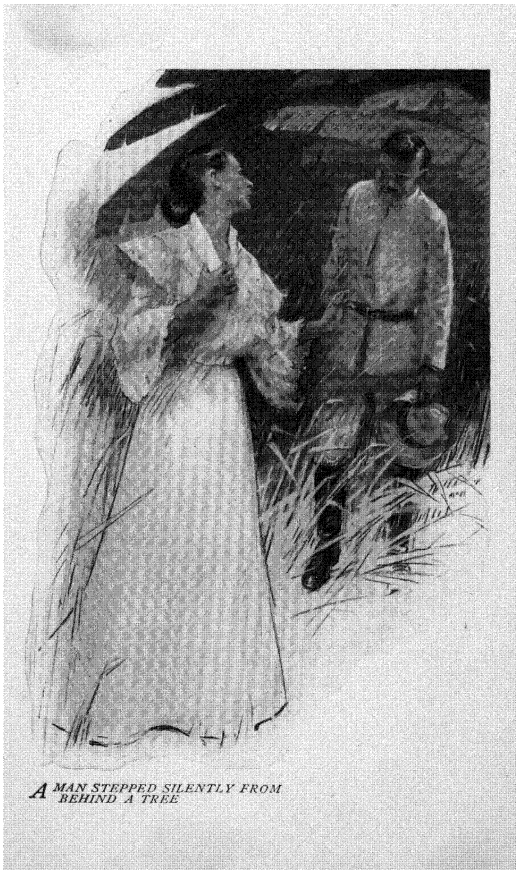

A MAN STEPPED SILENTLY FROM BEHIND A TREE

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ran to him. It was the officer known to the Americans as Colonel Martinez.

"I have heard," he said sorrowfully as the girl incoherently sobbed the sad news of her father's death. "I would have come sooner, but I believed the Americans would have been strong enough to prevent it."

"His last words were for you, Gregorio," Maria whispered as he patted caressingly her straight black hair. "He hoped that you would follow his example and surrender to General Wilson. Why do you not take your own name again?"

"Sister," the insurgent officer answered earnestly, "when my father disowned me for fighting under Aguinaldo in the north, I took the name of Remundo, and because I would not surrender after most of my men had been killed or captured I have been declared by the government of the islands an outlaw, and a price was put on my head. I am accused of many crimes of which I am not guilty. I have an enemy, who now stands high in government favor. It was he who harried the country using my name falsely, and for his deeds I am blamed. Captain Blynn

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has my written proofs. So you see I could not comply with our father's wish before, but now I am willing to lay down my life in order that Juan Rodriguez's soul may rest in peace, which it cannot do until his murderer has received his just punishment."

While they talked Gregorio Rodriguez had taken the small hand of Juan in his own, leading his sister along a tiny trail away from the river.

"I have a few trusty followers awaiting me a short distance beyond," he added, "and I wish you both to come with me. Your lives are too precious to allow you to be out of my sight."

Maria smiled happily and pressed her brother's hand.

After a quarter of an hour's walk the forest opened and they found themselves in the midst of a company of native soldiers. The men arose from the ground as their leader passed, doffing their hats to the woman walking so proudly with their officer. Gregorio stood silently in their midst, holding up his hand to demand attention.

In a few short lines he told his men of his real identity and of the horrible murder of

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his father by Espinosa; of the expedition which he had watched start out to attack the stronghold. To serve their best interests, he told them he should surrender with his force to the Americans, who would give them all fair and honorable treatment. Then he raised his voice and excitedly cried:

"Those who still desire to fight against their own interests under a traitor and a murderer may go forth unmolested. At once!" he cried, pointing to the trail leading inland, while his black eyes flashed.

Not a man gave ground; all looked trustfully up to their leader.

"Viva los Americanos," one shouted and the woods rang with their lusty cheers.

"Will you come to the ranch with me and surrender there to the Americans?" Maria asked, after the cheering had died away.

Gregorio shook his head.

"My first quest is Espinosa," he replied earnestly. "At once we shall march toward the stronghold. If he is captured or killed in the battle I shall seek General Wilson and surrender myself and men. If Espinosa escapes I shall follow him to the death."

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Maria knew the native spirit too well to attempt to urge her brother to give up this perilous quest of their father's murderer, so she bowed her head submissively.

An hour saw the band on the march, with Maria and Juan mounted on two ponies; quietly the native soldiers led by Gregorio Rodriguez circled the Americans encamped at the ranch and struck the trail taken in the morning by Captain Blynn and his five hundred soldiers.

Long before they came in sight of the stronghold the distant rumble of musketry and the thunder of artillery told them of the struggle at the top of the mountain.

Despairing of reaching the battle-field by the treacherous trail already covered by the Americans, Gregorio led his party to high ground across the valley from Matiginao. They arrived breathlessly at the summit and viewed the distant figures of men fighting in a hand-to-hand struggle.

Maria gasped in fear as she comprehended the awful sight of the struggle.

"The Americans are victorious," Gregorio exclaimed excitedly as he saw the wave of

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khaki sweep from two sides across the broad plateau. He saw the native insurgents huddled together in the centre of the American soldiers. But his eager eyes followed a small band of Americans and natives on the right of the mountain; he saw the natives in front of them give way slowly, contesting the battle-field foot by foot, while behind them he saw several score more of natives reach the edge of the plateau and rapidly disappear down the sheer side of the cliff.

"They are escaping," he cried in sudden alarm. "See, they are holding the Americans back to give those fleeing time to escape. It's Espinosa," he shouted hoarsely, beside himself with apprehension.

Between him and the valley at the foot of the precipice, Gregorio knew were many miles of impenetrable jungle, through which there was no trail. Yet he must push through this formidable barrier in an effort to cut off his enemy's escape. Calling up one of his trusty lieutenants he gave Maria and Juan in his charge.

"Take the trail and join the Americans," he ordered his sister. "Come," he com-

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manded, selecting a score of men by a motion of his hand. In another minute Gregorio, followed obediently by his selected followers, had plunged through the dense woods straight down the mountainside toward the avenue of escape over which Espinosa would soon be traveling, while Maria and her guard left their place of vantage and headed for the distant mountain top now in the hands of Captain Blynn and his victorious men.

Laboriously, but spurred forward by the eagerness of their leader, Gregorio and his small band toiled through the dense jungle. The distance was slowly covered and, almost exhausted, they were finally rewarded by reaching the trail leading from the stronghold to the northward.

Gregorio uttered an exclamation of surprise as his knowledge of woodcraft told him that a large force of men had recently passed over this road. Surely he had seen but a few score escape from the plateau.

Nothing daunted, in the lead, he urged his men forward. He would attack, no matter what were the odds against him. Espinosa should not escape!

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After several hours of strenuous marching a straggler was found on the side of the trail and after a hasty interview gave the anxious native the good tidings that Lopez was ahead on the same quest as himself.

Hurrying forward, most of the time on a run, he overtook his father's faithful servant just before darkness arrived, and together, unsparingly, they urged onward their tired men.

Gregorio's keen eyes were ever on the trail; in his heart was a desperate resolve. The thought of escape of Espinosa maddened him beyond endurance. The newly made grave in the family burying grounds spurred him on to almost superhuman exertions. Lopez, hardened as he was to toil in the fields, kept pace with his untiring young master, but many of the pursuing natives were left far behind.

"We are nearly to Banate," Lopez said intensely as they saw the high jungle slowly merge into nipa swamp. The cocoanut palms were becoming more and more infrequent and the mud of the trail clung to their tired feet.

So silently had they approached the little settlement at the foot of the hills rising from

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the delta of the river that the sudden barking of a dog caused them to stop in consternation.

With eyes open wide with anxiety and apprehension, Gregorio and Lopez pressed onward through the narrow street. They saw the natives were not as yet awake, the houses were closed and no human being was visible. On the ocean beach they saw many native boats hauled high above the tide. Anxiously they visited each in turn, but all were abandoned.

The sandy soil gave them no news of their quarry. Many footmarks were evident, but the tracks were so crossed and recrossed that even Gregorio gave up all hope of learning from them the direction taken by Espinosa and his men.

Gregorio stood in deepest dejection at the edge of the beach; his eyes sorrowfully scanned the dark waters. Had Espinosa turned off into the jungle, allowing him to go by, chuckling in his sleeve at the cleverness of his ruse? or had he embarked, and was he now sailing rapidly away toward freedom and wealth? Many of the straggling natives had now gathered about their chief and waited for

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his orders. They had ruthlessly entered the huts of the sleeping villagers and had dragged several of them trembling before their leaders.

"But a half hour ago a large proa was launched from down the beach," a native villager spoke up. "It had been waiting, and we were commanded to keep indoors on penalty of being shot. Through my bamboo shutter I saw it start."

Gregorio waited for no further words. Hastily turning to Lopez and Garcia he cried eagerly:

"Light three fires on the top of the hill, the signal to the gunboat." Then without spoken orders a half score of men helped the anxious Gregorio launch one of the small fishing boats lying high on the beach. As Lopez and his men hurried away, the native boat, with Gregorio at the helm, hoisted its bamboo sail to catch the light morning breeze and disappeared into the night.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE GUNBOAT ON GUARD

"THERE's a fire ashore there, sir," a lookout called in an eager voice as Phil accompanied by O'Neil stepped on deck, and the midshipman's joy was unbounded as he saw three points of light gradually grow into three unmistakable fires.

"The signal," he exclaimed. "We've got him. He can't escape us now."

Eagerly he listened to the sweet music of those hollow sounds caused as he knew by the play of the oars in their rowlocks. Scarcely a half mile away was Espinosa, blissfully unconscious of the presence of his sentinel gunboat. Then a great fear came into his mind as he thought of the cargo the approaching boat might be carrying. Were Maria and her brother captives of this cruel villain?

The anxious midshipman rang the engine bell for full speed ahead and the little gunboat quickly leaped to life. Espinosa was as

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good as captured. Inside of an hour day would break.

"Keep a sharp lookout," he shouted. The gunboat's bow had turned directly for the sound of the passing boat and he did not know at what moment it would appear suddenly from out of the darkness ahead.

Sydney and O'Neil stood beside Phil as the gunboat rushed forward.

"That's Espinosa, all right," O'Neil exclaimed joyfully as he went below, after taking a look about him, to get the forward three-pounder ready.

The two midshipmen strained their ears in vain into the night, but no sound of their quarry was evident.

The gunboat was again stopped and the word passed for silence. A stillness crept over the gunboat. The sailors stood alert, silent in strained attitudes of listening, but no sound could be heard to cheer the now depressed Americans.

"They've stopped rowing," Sydney exclaimed, "and with this breeze they must be going away from us fast." The midshipmen gazed at each other in consternation. What

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should be done? Should they steam ahead blindly, awaiting the day? Might not the proa have discovered the presence of the gunboat and changed its course? Both knew that ten miles to the eastward treacherous coral reefs covered the sea, through which the gunboat must navigate cautiously, even if it were possible to go at all. Was the outlaw again to escape? Then their attention was attracted by a new sound as the chug of oars came to their ears, but this time from a direction opposite to that taken by the first boat.

"It's a second boat," Phil exclaimed in a troubled voice. "What can it mean?" The noise of the approaching boat came closer and closer and then suddenly out of the night a great sail appeared, while a Spanish hail drifted across the waters:

"Espinosa is in a proa ahead of us. This is Colonel Martinez."

Both lads recognized their friend's voice, even before he declared his identity, and now with his mind made up that he must act quickly, Phil called back:

"I shall steam directly ahead for the reefs; stand by to take a line."

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The active natives caught the tow-line heaved to them from the stern of the gunboat, and the "Mindinao" at full speed raced toward the gray in the eastern sky, while the proa astern lowered her sail and leaped joyfully in tow of the steamer.

O'Neil stood like a statue at the bow's gun, his eyes endeavoring to pierce the gloom ahead. His eager eyes were conscious of the growing light. Farther and farther his range of vision grew; now a mile of sea on either bow was in sight, but barren of sail. Then from out the dissolving mist, the sailor saw a dim shadow and knew that the quarry at last was found and in easy range.

"I see her, sir," he hailed joyfully. "Can I give her a polite invitation to heave to?"

"Don't hit her, O'Neil," Phil answered excitedly; "put a shell as close as you can. She's nearly up to the reefs."

A roar and a blinding flash was O'Neil's answer to his captain's words.

Shell after shell was hurled after the fleeing boat but the Americans could see no inclination to obey the order of the challenge. Now silhouetted against the eastern sky, with a

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great spread of sail, Espinosa was straining everything to escape. From out the sea ahead a fiery sun arose, throwing its brilliant light into the eyes of those on the gunboat.

"Be careful, O'Neil," Phil urged earnestly. "Señorita Rodriguez may be in that boat."

"She's safe with our soldiers," Sydney called from the deck below, at hearing his friend's caution. "I've just talked with Martinez astern."

"Put a shot in that boat," Phil cried, and the roar of the three-pounder echoed his words.

Then suddenly a gentle tremble of the "Mindinao" made her young captain turn pale, as he rang for full speed astern.

"We're on the reef," he cried in anguish. "What shall we do? Hit her, O'Neil," he called beside himself; "he must not escape."

Sydney had rushed aft with several sailors close at his heels and taking the tow-line of the native boat astern, they hauled it up clear of the backing screws until the outrigger was alongside the gangway.

"Make room for ten of our sailors," he shouted to Martinez. "We want men who know how to shoot."

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While the water boiled above the swiftly revolving propellers slowly hauling the gunboat backward from its perilous position on a coral reef, all but two of the natives in the fishing boat climbed nimbly aboard and ten eager sailors, their rifles in hand, scrambled in.

The sharp detonations of the three-pounder added to the confusion of the scene.

As he saw the "Mindinao" was again afloat, Phil turned his eyes to the fleeing enemy. The boat, still untouched, was sailing swiftly away with an ever-increasing breeze behind it. Then his eyes opened in surprise and joy as he saw what Sydney had been doing.

"Come on, O'Neil, she's nearly out of range," he called excitedly. The sailor turned, took in the situation at a glance and seizing a rifle from a sailor near him followed his captain.

"She's dropped her sail," he cried, as a swift look over his shoulder to mark the effect of the last shot revealed but a small black speck on the water.

"I am sorry, Syd, but I must leave you to look out for the ship," Phil said as he leaped

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for the side of the native boat and grasped Colonel Martinez's hands. "Keep us in sight and see if you can work her through the reefs."

Sydney drew a long face, but he appreciated that Phil's greatest desire was to be in at the death, when Espinosa was captured.

The boat shoved off and the bamboo sail, far bigger in proportion than the sails carried by American boats, was quickly hoisted. The boat appeared to skim over the surface of the water. The gunboat slowly dropped astern, but now the proa had again hoisted its sail and the distance between the two boats seemed to be ever the same.

"We'll catch him if we have to chase him the whole fifty miles of water and then some," O'Neil cried angrily. "I don't see how I could have missed him."

Phil smiled feebly. "You were beginning to get pretty close," he said. "They lowered their sail so as to offer a smaller target for you to aim at."

"I thought I'd done it with a shell," the boatswain's mate replied disappointedly. "Well, if we get within the range of this little piece of iron," patting his rifle, "I'll take

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great pleasure in writing my initials on that Espinosa's yellow carcass."

The midshipman did not take this soft-hearted sailorman seriously. In a fight, he knew he was as brave as twenty men, but with a vanquished enemy he was as gentle as a woman.

"If we can catch him alive, I don't wish to kill him," Phil answered now, in Spanish, to include Rodriguez, who had not understood the declarations of the disappointed sailor.

"I claim the privilege of doing that, Señor Perry," the colonel replied.

Phil regarded him sternly. The native looked into the midshipman's eyes unwaveringly.

"Why should you?" the lad asked.

"Ah, señor, I had forgotten," the native said earnestly, taking his revolver from its holster and holding it butt forward to the midshipman. "Colonel Remundo in Luzon, Colonel Martinez in Kapay, and now Gregorio Rodriguez, surrenders to you as a prisoner of war."

Phil looked aghast, while O'Neil mumbled inarticulate nautical phrases of surprise.

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"Are you then Maria's brother?" the lad asked.

Gregorio nodded his head slowly, still holding his revolver for Phil to take.

"Put your revolver back," the midshipman ordered peremptorily. "You and I never have been enemies—except for a very short time," he added as the remembrance of those two anxious days after his capture on the "Negros" came into his mind. "Anyway, we have now the same objective, that murderer yonder, but," and he lowered his voice to a cold, hard tone, "you shall not kill him if we can capture him alive. I forbid it."

Gregorio's black eyes blazed, and despite the avowed friendship of the native, O'Neil reached hastily for his revolver. Then as suddenly the native mastered himself and with a shrug turned away his telltale eyes.

"I know how you feel, colonel," Phil declared conscious of the passion in the native's soul, "but I'd rather have it done regularly. We'll try him by a military commission for treason and hang him in the Plaza in Palilo as a warning to all traitors."

Slowly the fishing boat overhauled the

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bigger craft. Now the distance was but five hundred yards. The sun had risen and shone down on the green opalescent water. A report of a rifle-shot startled the Americans who had settled themselves for a long and monotonous chase.

"So they are going to offer resistance," Phil exclaimed.

"Yes; let him have it, O'Neil," he added as the sailor threw the muzzle of his piece forward and looked questioningly at the midshipman.

O'Neil's rifle cracked and a figure standing on the rail near the mast doubled up and fell forward in the boat.

A fusillade of shots followed from the fleeing boat, the bullets hissing in the water dangerously near the dozen huddled Americans.

"We can't allow this," Phil exclaimed uneasily; "they can't miss us if we get any closer.

"Open fire!" he ordered suddenly.

Ten rifles were discharged almost as one, and as quickly fired again and again. The sharp rattle of the breech blocks was continuous.

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By this time the Americans had approached abreast the enemy, but above its rail no human being was visible. Had all been killed by the unerring shooting of Phil's men?

Scarcely twenty yards separated the two boats. The larger craft, with sheets slacked, sailed silently onward. The helm swung idle; the hand that had steered it probably now lay limp in the bottom of the proa. Phil rose cautiously, his hand grasping the sail; he placed his foot on the high gunwale in an endeavor to discover the state of the enemy concealed in the bottom of the boat. As he drew himself up above his companions, the two boats slid noiselessly nearer and to the lad's horror he suddenly found himself looking squarely into the black muzzle of a pistol. Behind it burned the cruel eyes of Espinosa, while on the latter's face was a leer of triumph.

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CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

SCARCELY a second elapsed between the time Espinosa had leaped to the proa's deck and the discharge of his revolver, but in that second Phil had seen the awful havoc among the traitor's followers. Espinosa himself, sorely wounded as he was, could hardly have helped hitting his mark. Phil was conscious of a shot from his own boat almost simultaneously with a sharp pain in his left shoulder, and saw the would-be slayer pitch forward into the sea. In that second the outriggers of the two boats came together and Gregorio and his two natives quickly jumped on board to lower the captured vessel's sails, while O'Neil put the helm of his own craft over to bring the wind ahead and stop their progress.

Phil balanced himself on the sail of the boat, his eyes following the bubbles which closed over the body of the wounded man.

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Then a trembling seized him as a great black fin protruded from the water and the sun's rays reflected deep red against the green of the reef.

"Sharks," he cried hoarsely, balancing himself with a great effort, for he had been about to plunge overboard to rescue his enemy.

O'Neil as if by intuition had seized the lad by the foot and forcibly hauled him back into the boat.

The two boats were soon secured together and the Americans, putting aside their weapons of destruction, looked down pityingly upon the terrified natives huddled together in the bottom of the proa. Many were wounded by the Krag bullets and several had died not knowing pain, so swiftly had death come. Far astern a black curl of smoke marked the gunboat.

All hands turned to willingly and administered to the stricken enemy and soon all the wounded were made as comfortable as possible, their bleeding stanched, while the two boats were being steered toward the west. The treasure was found hidden under the foot-

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boards of the proa and this treasure had sealed the traitor's doom, for in carrying it he had delayed his flight, allowing Gregorio and Lopez to all but overtake him.

Inside of two hours the "Mindinao," steaming cautiously between the numberless shoals, took the Americans and their captives on board and was steaming joyfully back to Palilo with her glad tidings.

The wound in Phil's shoulder turned out happily to be but a glancing blow and under Sydney's administration he suffered only the inconvenience of carrying his arm in a black silk sling about his neck.

As Phil brought his gunboat for the last time to her berth, there on the dock stood General Wilson and his aides, and before the gangway had been down a moment they came on board to praise the work of the navy men, and hear the thrilling story of the end of Espinosa.

A sad-eyed stranger in civilian's clothes stood silently by as Phil modestly told how the outlaw had died. Then he grasped the lad's hand while the general murmured a name which made the young man blush as if

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with shame. He stood in the presence of Lieutenant Tillotson's father.

"My boy," the bereaved man said in a low voice, "you have a father's blessing. The general has told me of your unselfish and reckless act in a vain endeavor to save my son."

Phil turned away to hide his emotion.

Mr. Tillotson, taking the body of his son, sailed the following day for Manila.

For ten days the "Mindinao" remained quietly at her dock, while from all over the island there came to Palilo to surrender to the general small bands of insurgent soldiers. Gregorio Rodriguez, the acknowledged leader after Espinosa's death, had sent word to all his captains to stop fighting, and their obedience was instant.

One evening somewhat over a week later, on board the "Mindinao" a dinner party was in progress. The happy general, a weight of care lifted from his shoulders, sat on Phil's right, while about the board were the well-known faces of his friends. O'Neil, barred by naval etiquette from partaking at his captain's table, in the shadow of the night, stood near, hanging on every word spoken. The

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Chinese servants with smiling faces flitted between the galley and the quarter-deck.

Maria sat between the two midshipmen, and the sadness in her eyes still lingered, but a look of admiration would kindle as she talked to each of her two friends in turn.

General Wilson held in his hand two unopened telegrams which had just been handed him by an orderly.

The general tore one of the yellow envelopes and ran his eye hurriedly over the contents.

"My congratulations, governor," he exclaimed, as he passed the paper to Gregorio Rodriguez.

The native could hardly believe his eyes, for these were the words he read :

"Gregorio Rodriguez appointed civil governor of the Island of Kapay to-day by the governor-general."

Rodriguez rose to his feet and strode quietly to the general's side.

"General Wilson," he said reverently, "this fulfils my father's dearest wish. I would that he could know." Then he dropped on one knee and, much to the surprise of the gray-haired prosaic veteran, raised the blue-veined

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hand to his lips. Maria remained seated, but her dark eyes beamed lovingly on her brother.

Then the other telegram was opened and a smile appeared on the warrior's face.

The lads were consumed with impatience, for by the look in the general's eyes they realized it concerned them. He read the message.

"I am appointed ambassador to Japan. Have selected Blynn as military attaché and Midshipmen Perry and Monroe naval attachés to our embassy. Wire their answers.

"TILLOTSON."

The midshipmen's hearts beat fast and they were about to cry out their delight, when the tearful face of Maria caught their eye; and instead Phil answered soberly, "I doubt if we have sufficient rank to accept."

O'Neil had heard enough, and as he moved forward toward his hammock slung on the forecastle he murmured gruffly:

"I can't let 'em go alone. They need me to look out for them." And Phil and Sydney, had they heard, would have said he was right.

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